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THE INFLUENCES OF WARFARE ON THE RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE ANCIENT ASSYRIANS AND IRANIANS

by

© DAVID L. SPIER

A THESIS

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Influences of Warfare on the Recreational Activities of the Ancient Assyrians and Iranians" submitted by David L. Spier in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to analyze the influence of war on the recreational activities of the ancient Assyrians and Persians. A secondary aim was to compile and describe a collection of recreational activities of the Assyrian and Iranian civilizations. These civilizations were selected for two main reasons, the first that they could well provide an opportunity to gain considerable insight into the relationship between warfare and recreational activities, and the second that there has been an expanding wealth of information pertaining to recreational activities among the peoples of the ancient world, and it was felt that an in-depth study of the recreational habits of the Assyrian and Iranian civilizations would add to this body of knowledge.

An attempt was made to relate each recreational activity to warfare. However, in some instances this was not possible, in which case attempts were made to relate the particular recreational activity concerned to one or more of the cultural phenomena of religion, social structure, education and economics and politics.

The following hypothesis was examined. That the high incidence of warfare in ancient Assyria and Iran resulted in a large degree of participation in those recreational activities that helped to prepare men for battle. A considerable amount of evidence was found which tended to suggest that the high incidence of warfare in ancient Assyria and Iran did have some effect on the nature of the recreational activities participated in by the Assyrian and Iranian peoples. Notable among these activities were equestrian-related pastimes, archery, spear-throwing and hunting.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Archaeological evidence clearly demonstrates that long before the beginning of written history men were involved in warfare. As man progressed through the stone ages to the current age of modern technology, the art of warfare also developed to the extent that man now has weapons which are capable of destroying most forms of life on earth. However man has not always had such immensely destructive weapons. Indeed up to, and including the Second World War[1] success in warfare has depended to a considerable extent on the destruction of one force of armed men by another. Often the successful force was the one whose men were better prepared, both mentally and physically, to perform their duties. As a consequence, the preparation of men for battle has always been a matter of prime concern for any state that has been involved in warfare.

Many modern nations have used physical education as a means of preparing their men and women for war. Thus in Canada, just prior to World War I, the Minister of Militia encouraged cadet training and military drill in the physical education programs of the schools. The Strathcona Military Trust, founded in March 1909, also encouraged the establishment of military training programs in schools. Ontario in particular, throughout World War I, had very formal physical education programs, which emphasized cadet training and the development of a high level of fitness. Similar programs were initiated with the advent of World War II. In Ontario a new subject called "defense training" was

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[1]More recently, the nature of the war in Vietnam was such that highly trained men played dominant roles in combat with the enemy.

instituted in schools, while in 1944, cadet training was again made an obligatory subject of instruction in the secondary schools of the province.[2] Thus in Canada, physical education has played an important part in the preparation of young men and women for military duty.

At various times throughout history, numerous games and physical activities have been used to prepare men for warfare. Some of these activities including boxing, wrestling, judo, karate, jousting and fencing were forms of physical combat. Other activities such as archery, hunting and horse riding have also fulfilled important roles in helping men to develop the necessary skills of battle.

It was recognized that not all recreational activities can be related to warfare. For example activities such as certain ball games and ritual dances have had religious significance, while others, including swimming, rowing, fishing and hunting have been educational in that, in primitive societies at least, they prepared children for the duties of adult life.

Through an examination of the relationship between warfare and recreational activities, it was hoped that further light would be shed on the place of recreational activities in the societies of ancient Assyria and Iran. This may be of some consequence to physical educators, some of whom are concerned with the problem of the place of sport in society. A fuller understanding of this problem, will come with further studies on the relationships between recreational activities and religion ion, education, and other aspects of society.

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[2] G. Cass, "The History of Physical Education in Ontario Secondary Schools from 1862 to 1962," Journal of the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, XXX (December 1963-January 1964), 7.

The Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of the study was to analyze the influence of war on the recreational activities of the ancient Assyrians and Iranians. A secondary aim was to compile and describe a collection of recreational activities of the Assyrian and Iranian civilizations.

Definition of Terms

Recreational Activities. When applying this term to ancient Assyria and Iran, all aspects of sport, recreation and physical exercise were included. Recreational activities were classed as either active or passive, the latter including the diversion of spectatorship. Active recreational activities were further subdivided into mental and physical activities, the former comprising ones which were primarily concerned with the mind, such as board games, while physical activities were those of a corporeal nature.

Influences. An influence was considered as any factor that in any way affected the nature of participation in any recreational activity. The major influences included in this study were warfare, economics, social structure, education and religious beliefs.

Limitations

This study was limited by the availability of primary and secondary source material that was obtainable in and through libraries. A second limitation was that information on the ancient Assyrian peoples was not very plentiful. Many sites have not yet been excavated, and much of the written material found thus far has not been translated. The same basic difficulties applied in the case of the Iranian

civilization, although generally, the problem of a lack of translated material was not so acute.

Delimitations

In this study, definite chronological boundaries were set for both civilizations, these being as follows:

Assyria. Prior to 1814 B.C., when Shamshi-Adad I, founder of the First Assyrian Empire assumed power, the amount of evidence relating to recreational activities among the ancient Assyrians was found to be very limited. Consequently the period considered was taken from 1814 B.C. to 612 B.C., at which latter date the Medes destroyed Nineveh, and in so doing effectively ended Assyria as a great power.

Iran. The period that was studied was from 612 B.C., to 642 A.D. which was the close of the Sassanian period. However, within this period, only the Achaemenian, Parthian and Sassanian dynasties were studied. The short-lived period of Seleucid rule was omitted.

Only references available in the English language were used, although certain French, German and Spanish tests which showed illustrations of recreational activities were also referred to.

Organization of the Study

Not all recreational activities were found to be related solely to warfare. Indeed religion, social structure, and economic activities often had important bearings on the nature of the recreational activities participated in by the Assyrians and Iranians. Consequently, the most significant of these influences were selected and discussed in order to explain the relationship between them and recreational activities. It was felt that by including these influences it would be poss-

ible to see the effects of warfare on recreational activities in a clearer perspective than would otherwise be the case.

Chapter II serves to discuss the main influences that could have affected the recreational activities participated in by the ancient Assyrians, and which, in order of presentation, include social structure, economic activities, religion, education and warfare. Chapter IV uses the same criteria to assess the Iranian civilization from the standpoint of their recreational activities.

Descriptions of the recreational activities of the Assyrians and Iranian civilizations are found in Chapters III and V respectively. Together with the description of each activity is included a discussion on how the particular activity related to one or more of the above-mentioned influences. Particular emphasis was placed on the role played by recreational activities in the preparation of men for war.

Chapter VI is a resume of the interrelationships existing between recreational activities and warfare, social structure, economic activities, religion and education. In this final chapter, concluding comments are made regarding the influence of war on the recreational activities of the ancient Assyrians and Iranians.

CHAPTER II

ASPECTS OF THE ASSYRIAN CIVILIZATION

GEOGRAPHY

"The north-east corner of Upper Mesopotamia, where the river Tigris runs from north-west to south-east, constitutes the region usually designated as Assyria."[1] To the south of this area was Southern Mesopotamia or Babylonia, while to the north and east ran the highlands of Anatolia and Iran respectively.[2] What is known today as the Arabian massif was situated to the south-west, and the whole of Mesopotamia was cut off from the Mediterranean Sea by the coastal mountains of Palestine and Lebanon.[3] The geographical position of ancient Assyria in relation to these other regions can be seen in Map 1.

The topography of the Assyrian region was gently undulating, surrounded and intersected by eroded hill chains which formed a mosaic of barren upland and comparatively small but fertile valleys.[4]

The climate of the area was basically continental in type, with hot, dry summers and comparatively cold winters. Rainfall occurred during the winter and spring months, with greater amounts falling in the northern and eastern regions. The 200 millimeter isohyet, regarded

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[1] H. Lewy, Assyria C.2600-1816 B.C. Cambridge Ancient History Reprint of Vol. VI, Chapter 25 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 3.

[2] David Oates, Studies in the Ancient History of Northern Iraq (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 1.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 3.

as the minimum necessary for successful dry cultivation of cereal crops, described a great arc across the middle of the northern plain.[5]

Because of these varying physical conditions, the economic potential of different parts of the region vary considerably. Thus on the flanks of the Arabian massif seasonal grazing is possible together with a few catch-crops in the dry stream beds. For these reasons this area was inhabited only by pastoral nomads. A similar situation exists in the plain immediately to the north and north-east, although a marginally better climate encourages a semi-nomadic economy based mainly on sheep. Settled agriculture is possible where the entrenched valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates and their major tributaries widen sufficiently to provide irrigable belts of alluvium.[6] In the alluvial plain of the south, lift or natural flow irrigation has been used to water the land in the immediate vicinity of the rivers. While irrigation has enabled the production of high crop yields, it has necessitated a high degree of social organization, and has also brought with it problems of salination due to drainage difficulties on the very flat land. Finally the valleys in the foothills of the Anatolian and Zagros highlands are endowed with a relatively high rainfall together with perennial streams and fertile soil. In these areas, crops and fruit could be grown without irrigation, and sheep and goats are also raised.

As is the case with the present-day inhabitants of this region, the ancient Assyrians relied heavily on the Tigris and its tributaries for existence. Without the rivers, their water and alluvial deposits,

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[5] Ibid., p. 3.

[6] Ibid., p. 4.

settlement would be restricted to the northern foothill areas. Thus, apart from occasional famines brought about by wars and flooding of the two rivers, ". . . the Mesopotamians generally enjoyed a rich and varied diet and were much better off in this respect than their neighbours of Syria, Iran or Asia Minor."[7]

The frontiers between Mesopotamia and the mountain regions of the north-east and north never became stabilized. They constituted a line of contact between Mesopotamia and the lands bordering inner Asia.

> Through the passes of these mountains came such essential materials as metals (especially tin), precious stones, aromatic matter, and timber, all in great demand in the lowlands, where increasing prosperity based on agriculture made its inhabitants feel the lack of such materials.[8]

Because ancient Mesopotamia was one of the most prosperous areas in the ancient world, its fertile irrigated fields and great cities that rose between the Tigris and Euphrates, presented to the peoples of the surrounding areas, who were not endowed by nature with the same opportunities, a goal for their urge to conquest.[9] "The history of Mesopotamia is therefore an account of a land whose culture is influenced by persistent incursions from the mountains to the east and from the desert to the west."[10] Sometimes these incursions were peaceful, but more often they were aggressive in nature.

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[7]Georges Roux, Ancient Iraq (Suffolk: Pelican Books, 1969), p. 24.

[8]A. Leo Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Dead Civilization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 36.

[9]J. Laessoe, People of Ancient Assyria, trans. F.S. Leigh-Browne (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 14.

[10]Ibid.

> The mountain tribes exerted a continuous pressure against the inhabitants of the plains, whose resistance depended on their momentary political and economic situation. At times, the mountaineers entered the plains as workmen or mercenaries, at others they infiltrated as bandits or descended en masse to conquer cities and kingdoms and to rule over them.[11]

Thus the geographical situation of ancient Assyria was such that the country was under an almost constant threat of invasion, particularly from the mountain areas. The first Assyrian response to this threat was to try and colonize, but when this failed they attempted to subjugate the regions which harbored these menacing peoples, which in turn led to a high frequency of warfare in the whole Mesopotamian area.

HISTORY

The history of Assyria before and after the thirteenth century B.C. is a history of contrasts:

> The early period lacks that spirit of military aggressiveness which is so characteristic of the later; in its place we meet an efficiency in organizing overland trade relations and internal commercial activities that is not conspicuous in the documents of the period after the Dark Age.[12]

This is evidenced by the fact that during the late second and early first millennia B.C., Assyrian merchants are attested as having had a controlling interest in trade throughout parts of Anatolia and most of Mesopotamia.[13]

This, of course, does not mean that during the early period of Assyrian history, military activity was absent. Indeed, during the

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[11] Oppenheim, loc. cit.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., p. 164.

reign of Shamshi-Adad I, (1814 - 1782 B.C.), the Assyrians conquered and governed nearly all of northern Mesopotamia.[14] However, with the death of Shamshi-Adad, the empire quickly disintegrated, and Assyrian power was eclipsed first by the Babylonians under Hammurabi, and then by the Hittite and Mittanian states. During this period of decline, which lasted for almost five centuries, the Assyrians lost their position as a leading merchant state, and were hard-pressed to even survive as a nation.

The accession of Ashur-Uballit (1365 - 1330 B.C.) marked the beginning of a temporary resurgance of Assyrian power. The Assyrian task was made a great deal easier by the Hittite victory over Mitanni:

> The victory of the Hittite king Suppiluliuma (ca. 1380 - 1340 B.C.) sealed the doom of the Mitanni kingdom, of which Assyria seems to have been a vassal for a prolonged period. This victory brought Syria under Hittite influence and enabled Assyria to become independent and to fight for a place among the nations of the Amarna age and thereafter. The following centuries represent the formative period in which Assyria had to develop concepts of foreign policy for defensive as well as for offensive purposes.[15]

The foreign policy formulated by the Assyrians had three main areas of concern, the first of which was to deal with a type of guerilla warfare fought against the mountain peoples of north-eastern Mesopotamia. The advantage of this policy was twofold in that it protected Assyria from small scale invasions from the mountain tribes, and also created a buffer region, protecting the Assyrian homeland from attack by large powers from the north and east.[16] The second thrust was directed against

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[14] Roux, op. cit., p. 174.

[15] Oppenheim, op. cit., p. 165.

[16] Oppenheim, op. cit., p. 165.

Babylonia and towards her southern neighbour, Assyria displayed a very aggressive attitude. The first reason for this aggressive policy was that the rich plain and opulent cities of the Mesopotamian delta were a constant temptation to the Assyrians. A second rationale was that the region was a source of worry, as the peoples of Babylonia had always claimed lordship over their northern neighbours. A final point was that the Assyrian rulers recognized that if they could control Southern Mesopotamia, they would gain access to the Persian Gulf and the prosperous trade of the area.[17] The third and final thrust was against the west and here again the Assyrians were relentlessly on the offensive.[18] Assyria was virtually forced to conquer and police this western steppe area for not only did it protect the Assyrian homeland from hostile armies and nomadic invaders, but it meant the control of important trade routes, and eventually of northern Syria, which gave it access to the Mediterranean.[19]

This policy was followed by the successors of Ashur-Uballit, including Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244 - 1208 B.C.), who conquered Babylon; Adad-ninari I (1307 - 1275 B.C.), and Shalmaneser I (1274 - 1245 B.C.), both of whom advanced westward as far as Palmyra; and finally Tiglath-pileser I (1115 - 1077 B.C.), who conquered Babylon and also reached the Phoenician coast where he received tribute from Arvad, Byblos and Sidon.[20] However this phase of Assyrian military expansion came to an

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[17] Roux, op. cit., p. 236.

[18] Oppenheim, loc. cit.

[19] Roux, op. cit., p. 165.

[20] Roux, op. cit., p. 253.

abrupt end with the murder of Tiglathpileser, and for the next one hundred and sixty six years, the Assyrians were involved in a desperate struggle for survival against a mounting tide of Aramaean invaders.[21]

In 911 B.C. Adad-nirari II (911 - 891 B.C.) ascended the throne and it was ". . . he who loosened the grip of Assyria's enemies and unknowingly opened the last and most brilliant chapter in the history of the northern kingdom."[22] He successfully drove the Aramaeans out of the Tigris valley, carried out campaigns in the mountains, and defeated Babylon.

During this last phase of Assyrian history, the emphasis on strength through trade and war shifted to a policy of total war and destruction on her enemies. These wars had three main motives.[23] Fundamentally they were defensive, or rather preventive, wars aimed at protecting Assyria from its hostile neighbours. This was particularly true when Urartu emerged as a large, prosperous and powerful nation which played an ever increasing role in the politics of the Near East. To the Assyrians Urartu was both a source of constant worry and also a challenge. However, as Roux has stated:

> Before they could stand face to face with their mighty rivals they had to strengthen their own position in Mesopotamia and conquer and firmly hold Syria and western Iran, those two pillars of Urartian dominion outside Armenia. The time of quick, easy, fruitful razzias was over. Assyria had no choice but to become an empire or perish.[24]

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., p. 257.

[23] Ibid., p. 258.

[24] Ibid., p. 276.

Secondly, the wars were predatory as a victorious campaign meant the capture of men and booty, and additionally, vanquished countries were forced by pay tribute. Finally, the wars had religious motives:

> In Mesopotamian philosophy the divine hierarchy in heaven had its counterpart on earth, and since the god Ashur stood well above the other gods, it was imperative that his vicar and representative the king of Assyria, should hold sway over all other princes. This in general could only be achieved by force and, if necessary, by recourse to terrorism. What to us seems simply massacre and robbery was therefore religiously justifiable. The king's enemies were the god's enemies; they were 'wicked devils' deserving punishment. Thus each Assyrian campaign was a measure of self-defence and act of brigandry, but also a crusade. The booty collected and the tribute levied on foreign countries were a source of income and a means of weakening possible aggressors, as well as a token of submission to the supreme deity of Assyria.[25]

Following a period of temporary decline during the seventh century B.C., Tiglathpileser III came to the throne in 745 B.C., and he and his immediate successors ruled for the following 120 years, during which time the Assyrian civilization reached its zenith. Urartu, Babylon and Egypt were all defeated and the empire extended to the Persian Gulf and Elam in the east, the Armenian Mountains in the north, the Mediterranean and Cyprus in the west, and the Arabian Desert and Egypt in the south.[26]

During the sixth and seventh centuries B.C., Assyria was chiefly a military power rather than a trading state, and owed its prestige mainly to its army's high degree or organization and perfection of discipline.[27] As well as military success, the Assyrians, like all conquerors in anti-

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[25] Ibid., p. 258.

[26] Andre Parrot, The Arts of Assyria, trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons (New York: Golden Press, 1961), p.2.

[27] S. Moscati, Ancient Semitic Civilizations (London: Eleck Books, 1957), p. 52.

quity, practised a policy of terror as a means of commanding respect and enforcing obedience among the conquered peoples.[28] Thus Ashurnasirpal II after quashing a rebellion wrote:

> I built a pillar over against his city gate and I flayed all the chiefs who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skin. Some I walled up within the pillar, some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes, and others I bound to stakes round the pillar. . . And I cut the limbs of the officers, of the royal officers who had rebelled. . .
>
> Many captives from among them I burned with fire, and many I took as living captives. From some I cut off their noses their ears and their fingers, of many I put out their eyes. I made one pillar of the living and another of heads, and I bound their heads to tree trunks round about the city. Their young men and maidens I burned in the fire.
>
> Twenty men I captured alive and I immured them in the wall of his palace. . .
>
> The rest of their warriors I consumed with thirst in the desert of the Euphrates. . . .[29]

Another policy used by the Assyrian monarchs to control rebellious peoples was the large-scale deportation of peoples from one area to another. These policies did succeed in striking fear throughout the entire Near East, but at the same time they also aroused feelings of intense hatred against the Assyrians, and this hatred became more and more evident by an increasing number of revolts among the subject states. Thus during the sixth century B.C., the Assyrians were almost constantly involved in the putting down of rebellions throughout the empire.

> In this endless struggle the Assyrians used up their strength, ruined their own possessions and failed to pay sufficient attention to the capital event which was taking place during that time behind the screen of the Zagros: the formation of a powerful Median kingdom, the future instrument of their downfall.[30]

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[28] Roux, op. cit., p. 263.

[29] Ibid., pp. 263-264.

[30] Ibid., p. 287.

The great empire was also weakened by dynastic struggles which often occurred after the death of a king.

Finally Nabopolassar, a Babylonian, took Mesopotamia proper, and the Medes, under Cyaxares, descended upon Assyria from the Iranian plateau, captured Assur, the old capital in 614 B.C., and Nineveh in 612 B.C. Although there were remnants of the army left, ". . . the history of a mighty Assyria had run its course."[31]

Thus throughout its long history Assyria showed itself to be a war-like nation. In the second millennium B.C., when they had a large trading empire, the Assyrians were involved in conquering other nations, or in fighting to keep their small homeland. Even during the first four centuries of the first millennium B.C., when Assyrian civilization reached its climax, the empire was dependent for survival on the continued success of the military. When the army was ultimately weakened, both through years of almost constant fighting and the large numbers of foreigners in the ranks, Assyria herself was overrun by invaders, just as she herself had conquered and destroyed others.

ASSYRIAN SOCIETY

Throughout the long history of Assyria, the social structure of that nation remained fundamentally unchanged. Thus, in its earliest stages, Assyrian society recognized a threefold division among its members. Between the free man and the slave, there was an intermediate class, the mushkinu, which was worth, in the literal sense of the term, less than the former and more than the latter.[32] However, from about the eighteenth

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[31] Oppenheim, op. cit., p. 170.

[32] Georges Contenau, Everyday Life in Babylon and Assyria, trans. K.R. and A.R. Maxwell-Hyslop (London: E. Arnold, 1954), p. 15.

century B.C., this intermediate class was of minor importance, and Assyrian society thus consisted essentially of two main legal classes, the free men and the slaves. Such a division was determined by the legal status possessed by members of the two groups. Thus both classes were subject to the law, but in the courts and in the penalties to which they could be exposed, the free men were accepted as being of greater value than the slaves.[33]

Outside of this two-fold division was the king, who occupied a unique position in the Assyrian state. From the religious point of view, the king was:

> Primarily the link between the gods and the people whom they had created to do them service. He represented the people before the gods, and in turn was the pipeline through which the gods regulated the affairs of state for the people.[34]

He was looked upon as being the high priest of the god Assur, and as such he performed sacrifices and was in a position to influence both temple and cult.[35] As well as being the religious leader of Assyria, the king was the commander-in-chief of the army, as well as the head of the government.[36] In many ways, he was the state, and was certainly a class apart from the other groups of society.

Within the class of free-men, there existed marked social strata, which differed from each other on the basis of both social and economic status. At the top of the scale in this group stood the aristocracy, the mar banuti, all of whom held important positions in Assyrian society.

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[33] Ibid.

[34] H. W. F. Saggs, Everyday Life in Babylonia and Assyria (London: B. T. Batsford, 1965), p. 361.

[35] Oppenheim, op. cit., p. 99

[36] Roux, op. cit., p. 307.

> The generals, high-priests and provincial governors appointed by the king came exclusively from the upper class of society, and on their loyalty to the throne depended the cohesion of the empire and the regular functioning of its government.[37]

These dignitaries, together with the highest officials of the central administration, ". . . all lived on their own lands or on the vast estates belonging to the crown and received their share of war booty and of the multiple taxes levied in Assyria and in the vassal countries."[38]

After the nobles came the ummane, free men who had a definite profession, including physicians, merchants, scribes, bankers, artisans and the less important priests. Many members of this group were employed in the courts of Nineveh, and in the residences of provincial governors and other nobles. Thus on a tablet found during excavations at Nimrud, a royal household employed ". . . charioteers, guards, scribes, musicians, diviners, exorcists, leather workers, seal cutters, messengers, lieutenants, adjutants and the donkey driver for a litter."[39] These men were organized in guilds similar to those of the Middle Ages.[40] There were two main types of guilds, the first comprised of religious groups consisting of certain highly trained experts in exorcism and divination techniques, whilst the second were guild-like associations of merchants and craftsmen, most of whom were organized under an ahlu, or palace overseer.[41] As the prosperity of the kingdom rested upon them, the ummane were a very

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[37] Ibid., p. 313.

[38] Ibid.

[39] B. Parker, "The Assyrian Civil Service," Sumer, XVI (1960), p. 35.

[40] Roux, op. cit., p. 307

[41] Oppenheim, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

important group in Assyrian society, and apparently their importance was recognized by the other social classes.[42]

At the bottom of the class of free men were the hupshi, an ill-defined class which probably consisted of menial agricultural labourers and the rank and file members of the standing army. Some members of this group were employed in the great residences to care for the various animals and birds that were kept.[43]

While many of the ummane and hupshi were employed in the royal residences, others lived in villages and small cities distributed throughout the Assyrian empire. One tablet found at Nimrud mentions that in one small area of the empire, there were ". . . intelligence officers, guardsmen, oil pressers, bird keepers, bird herds, potters, carpenters, camel drivers and merchants."[44] Another small tablet, also from Nimrud, lists a register of workmen or soldiers in or from certain villages.[45] There are some thirty to fifty men for each village, and they were probably used in the army or on public works.[46]

In rural areas, villagers were held either in ". . . feudal tenure or in private possession by a lord of the manor--the king, his high officials, or members of his family."[47] These people formed the ruling class of 'feudal' lords, who controlled the affairs of the villages and also the

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[42] Roux, op. cit., p. 314.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Parker, op. cit., p. 37.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Oppenheim, op. cit., p. 86.

people that lived there.

The lowest class of society were the slaves who had no rights under the law.

> A slave had no human personality. He was merely an item of real property, and in legal documents he was referred to merely as 'slave unit', or, if his name was mentioned, that of his father was omitted. If he was injured, it was his master and not, he himself who was entitled to compensation, while, since by definition he represented a certain monetary value to his owner, the law did not envisage the possibility of the latter's deliberately killing him.[48]

Some slaves were owned by private citizens, while others were attached to temples, palaces and other large 'organizations'. Generally slaves were held only in small numbers in private households, mainly due to the absence of any interest in industrial production on the home level.[49] Such production was restricted in the ancient Near East to the highly organized centers in the temples, royal palaces and provincial manors.[50]

Slaves in private possession were either born in the house, acquired by purchase, recruited from among debtors and their wives and children, or occasionally were taken as shares of booty taken in war, and distributed among the soldiers.[51] Most of the slaves who worked in the palaces and temples were brought in from conquered territories, as prisoners of war.[52] These slaves, known as shirku, were controlled by a temple official, and they were required to work not only in the temple, but in the towns on public works. They could also be hired out to work

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[48]Contenau, op. cit., p. 20

[49]Oppenheim, op. cit., p. 76.

[50]Ibid.

[51]Ibid., p. 75.

[52]Contenau, op. cit., p. 23.

for private employers.[53] During the first four centuries of the first millennium B.C., when Assyrian expansion reached its height, the number of slaves brought in after successful military campaigns resulted in the population of slaves in Assyria being greater than at any other period in the history of that nation.

Although slaves were without legal rights, some of them at least were able to ". . . learn a profession, acquire property, borrow grain or money, bear witness in court and even possess their own slaves."[54] Furthermore, privately owned slaves had a chance of gaining their freedom. For example women and children who were deposited as security with a creditor had to be released after four years, and the children of a marriage between a free woman and a slave were free.[55]

Because of the relatively limited amount of pertinent material that has been excavated, it is not yet possible to write a detailed social history of the ancient Assyrians. The greater part of our information concerns the lives of the kings, while we know relatively little about the activities of the slaves and the lower classes of free men. However, the various groups of society shared one common duty in that ". . . they were at the king's disposal for the execution of the great public works and for the 'national industry' of Assyria, war."[56]

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[53]Contenau, op. cit., p. 23.

[54]Roux, op. cit., p. 314.

[55]Contenau, loc. cit.

[56]Roux, op. cit., p. 314.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Throughout the entire development of Assyrian society, agriculture remained the primary economic basis of the nation. Supplementary income was derived from trade in wool, hair and leather.[57] Industrial production was concerned almost exclusively with the weaving of textiles and related activities. As has been mentioned previously, such industrial production was done mainly in the temples, palaces and other such centers; private households produced hardly enough for their own use.[58]

The cultivation of most cereals and large-scale planting of the date palm was done on several levels. First, extensive temple and palace grounds were utilized, either directly by the staff, or by being farmed out. Secondly, private land was used, and finally the poorer people, including nomads, shepherds and some city dwellers managed to raise crops on their own small plots of land. "The proportionate amount of land held by each of these types of producers is impossible to establish and undoubtably varied according to the period, the region, and the condition of the soil."[59]

The plain watered by the Tigris and the Euphrates was rich farming land, and was even richer in antiquity before extensive salinization of the soil took place.[60] However in areas where rainfall was unsufficient for the cultivation of crops, all areas of land except a very thin strip next to the rivers, had to be irrigated. Partly in order to enable some

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[57] Oppenheim, op. cit., p. 84.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Roux, op. cit., p. 23.

measure of flood control to be effected, extensive canal systems were constructed. In this manner, the area of cultivable land was greatly enlarged.[61] "From the very earliest times the rulers of Mesopotamia regarded it both as a duty and as an act of piety to improve the canal system."[62] Thus Sennacherib, in his annals, described himself as one ". . . who digs canals, opens wells, runs irrigation ditches, who brings plenty and abundance to the wide acres of Assyria, who furnishes water for irrigation to Assyria's meadows."[63] This high degree of central control over irrigation was necessary, for only the palace, and of course the temples, were capable of investing the capital necessary to constantly replace silted-up canals and reinforcing weakened dikes.[64]

In addition to the cereal crops, the areas in and around the cultivable lands were used to produce a multiplicity of other things. For example, livestock, mainly cattle, sheep and goats were raised, while fish were caught in the rivers and canals. A variety of fruit and vegetables were also grown.[65] As well as these activities, animals and birds were hunted. Some of the catches were used as a means of supplementing the food supply of the local population. However, a considerable amount of small game was captured alive and sent to the large city centers, where it was used as food, religious sacrifices, or for divination. Thus the agricultural base of the Assyrian economy was both extensively

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[61] Contenau, op. cit., p. 41.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Daniel D. Luckenbill, Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia, Vol. II, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 184.

[64] Oppenheim, op. cit., p. 84.

[65] Roux, op. cit., p. 24.

developed and widely diversified.

Trade, both foreign and inter-city, while not as significant as agriculture, was always important to the economy of Assyria. Indeed, the early history of Assyria was more conspicuous for trade and commercial activities than it was for warfare.[66] Foreign trade was carried out on a highly organized basis with other Near Eastern powers, and also in a less formal manner between ". . . foreign cities, trading outposts, and barbarian tribes who lacked the prestige, the political power, and the initiative necessary to engage in trade relations on the basis of treaties."[67] Such trade usually meant the export of textiles from Mesopotamia, and the import of metal, lumber, spices, perfumes and precious metal and stones. However, late in the second millennium B.C., a great deal of trade was carried out by royal emissaries carrying precious goods from one ruler to another.[68] During this period trade seems to have been conducted largely on an administrative level, and unlike earlier periods, private initiative or gain was not openly admitted. At its greatest extent, the Assyrian trading empire extended from Egypt and Turkey in the south-west and north-west respectively, through the coastal areas of the eastern Mediterranean, south through Babylonia, east via the Persian Gulf, and north into Anatolia.[69] Such an empire served to emphasize the dominance of not only Assyria, but of Mesopotamia over the rest of the ancient Near East.

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[66] Oppenheim, op. cit., p. 84.

[67] Ibid., p. 91.

[68] Ibid., p. 93.

[69] Oppenheim, op. cit., p. 90.

The last significant factors that contributed to the prosperity of the Assyrian empire were plunder and tribute obtained from conquered and vassal states. Probably the greatest single amount of plunder was obtained by Sargon after the defeat of Urartu. Apart from carrying off the Urartuan king's wife, sons and daughters, Sargon took:

> 6,110 people, 12 mules, 380 asses, 525 cattle, 1,235 sheep I added (counted) them and brought them inside the wall of my encampment. . . . I broke open the seals of their treasure. (34 talents), 18 minas of gold, 167 talents, 2½ minas of silver, white bronze, lead, carnelian, lapis lazuli, UD-ASH stone, precious stones in great quantities, staves of ivory, maple, and boxwood, together with their knobs(?) whose inlay was of gold and silver.[70]

Such plunder, together with the proceeds of multiple taxes that were levied on the vassal countries were kept in the royal treasury to help maintain the court and its many financial obligations including public works and the army. Most of the large land owners also received a share of war booty and taxes.[71]

The Assyrian economy was thus based primarily on agriculture, and was supplemented by trade, industry and plunder and tribute from conquered territories. However, despite the great wealth that was obtained, only the privileged classes of society directly shared in the prosperity. Indeed under the latter Sargonids, the court and nobility became increasingly corrupt, while the lower classes of society found it more and more difficult to exist at anything close to a comfortable standard of living.

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[70]Luckenbill, op. cit., p. 95.

[71]Roux, op. cit., p. 313.

RELIGION

The region immediately to the south of the Assyrian homeland was inhabited by the peoples of Babylonia who, very early in the history of man, established a relatively advanced civilization. From the earliest years of its history, Assyria was influenced by the Babylonians, particularly in the area of religion.[72] This influence was so great that it is difficult to discuss Assyrian religion without also referring to the religious beliefs held by their neighbours to the south. The two religions shared many similarities, and a subsequent lack of individuality is revealed in the Assyrian religion.[73] Indeed, examined in this way, it appears as though there were but two important features of Assyrian religious practice which were not found in that of Babylonia. One consisted of the position of Ashur, the national god, while the other lay in the prominence of the gods of war, or of the warlike characteristics of well-known gods.[74]

The great similarity between the two religions is well exemplified by looking at some of the gods worshipped by the Assyrians and Babylonians. Although the names of some gods were altered, and changes in the relative importance of various gods took place, the general order of the Assyrian and Babylonian pantheon was the same as that established by the Sumerians in the middle of the third millennium B.C.[75] Thus

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[72] S. H. Hooke, Babylonian and Assyrian Religion (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1948), p. 11.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Hooke, op. cit., p. 24.

Marduk, the patron god of Babylon, who played the main part in the creation of an orderly world, was known in Assyria as Ashur. However, Ashur performed other important functions which served to make him a god who was peculiar to the Assyrian nation. Thus he led and directed the nation ". . . especially the king, in peace and war, inspiring the soldiery by his presence, and exacting divine vengeance on the enemies of his people."[76] Indeed Ashur was the national god of the Assyrians, and by far their most important deity. There were numerous other gods in the Assyrian pantheon who also had their Babylonian counterparts. These included Enlil, who in Assur, was second in importance to Ashur; Adad, the west Semitic weather-god; the moon-god Sin; and Ishtar, who on the one hand was the goddess of love and on the other, particularly in Assyria, the goddess of war.

In Assyria, religion pervaded every aspect of human life.[77]

> Sumerians, Babylonians and Assyrians looked up to their gods as servants look to their masters: with submission and fear, but also with admiration and love. For kings and commoners alike, obedience to divine orders was the greatest of qualities, as the service of the gods was the most imperative of duties. While the celebration of the various festivals and the performance of the complicated rituals of the cult were the task of priests, it was the duty of every citizen to send offerings to the temples, to attend the main religious ceremonies, to care for the dead, to pray and make penance, and to observe the innumerable rules and taboos that marked nearly every moment of his life. A sensible man 'feared the gods' and scrupulously followed their prescriptions. To do otherwise was not only foolish but sinful, and sin--as everyone knew--brought on man's head the most terrible punishments.[78]

A further indication of the extent to which religion dominated

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[76] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 3. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), p. 91.

[77] Moscati, op. cit., p. 57.

[78] Roux, op. cit., p. 97.

the lives of the ancient Assyrians can be guaged from the fact that many events of national significance, such as festivals, were religious in nature. The most important of these festivals was the one held to celebrate the New Year.[79] Being an agricultural people, the pattern of the religious year followed the procession of the seasons, and in either spring, when new growth appeared, or in autumn, when the crops had been harvested, the beginning of the year was celebrated.[80] Part of this New Year Festival was the Epic of Creation, which was recited twice through a series of ritual acts, which were intended to be a dramatic re-enactment of a contest between Ashur and the dragon of chaos, Tiamat, in which the former was always victorious. "It is possible that in Assyria, this took the form of a contest between the king and a lion, or lions, procured for the purpose."[81] Regardless of whether or not this was the case, it is known that the Assyrian kings hunted lions, as well as other large prey, and that after the hunt, the kings offered libations to the gods over the bodies of some of the dead animals. Thus Ashurbanipal recorded that ". . . the lions which I slew--the terrible bow of Ishtar, lady of battle, I aimed upon them. I brought an offering, I poured out wine over them."[82]

One of the most important factors in the life of the Assyrians was the fear of devils and evil spirits, and to a lesser degree the fear

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[79] Hooke, op. cit., p. 58.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid., p. 60.

[82] Luckenbill, op. cit., p. 114.

of offended gods. Especially feared were spirits of the dead who had not had the due burial rites performed over them.[83] This belief in evil demons and their power was an ever-present pre-occupation in the minds of the people. Every kind of sickness and misfortune were attributed to evil spirits, and special priests performed rituals daily to ward off dangers or cure individuals.

The Assyrian king was the head of the clergy and as such was appointed high priest. His religious duties included the interpretation of the will of the gods and the representation of his people before the gods.[84] To assist the king in interpreting the will of the gods, there existed a large body of priests whose duty it was to collect and interpret omens. Almost every kind of happening was regarded as having a religious significance, in that it supposedly indicated the disposition of the gods, whether favourable or unfavourable, towards a particular event. Thus before undertaking a military campaign, or making other important decisions, the Assyrian kings always sought the advice of these priests. Indeed, these baru-priests or diviners, invariably accompanied the army on campaigns. Divination techniques included observation of flights of birds, the relation of heavenly bodies to one another, peculiar appearances of the sun and moon, the appearance of entrails and liver of slaughtered animals, and many others, including dreams and multiple births.[85] Thus on one occasion, an eclipse of the sun was interpreted to be encouragement by the gods to wage war against

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[83] Ibid.

[84] Henri Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 252.

[85] Hooke, op. cit., p. 86.

Assyria's western neighbours.[86]

As well as this the king was responsible for the building and maintenance of temples, the appointment of some of the priests, as well as a leadership role in the major religious ceremonies such as the feast of the New Moon, or the New Year Festival.[87] It appears that certain rituals were designed for the king including the takultu, or eating ritual, which was in effect, a banquet offered to the gods in exchange for their protection, and the bit rimki ritual, a royal bath during which prayers were offered to various deities.[88]

The ancient Mesopotamians believed that after death a man's soul passed through the tomb and descended into the underworld. Here the dead led a gloomy life, although their lot could be alleviated somewhat by offerings made by friends and relatives who were still living.[89] Those who were neglected by their relatives, along with the unburied, wandered restlessly about, and occasionally returned to earth in the guise of evil spirits to trouble man.[90]

Thus religion was a dominant force throughout the life of every Assyrian. With a complicated and rigidly defined ritual to follow, the individual was able to consult with the gods on almost every aspect of daily life. This was particularly true of the Assyrian king who, because he was a high priest as well as the head of state, ". . . was the slave of a complicated system of magico-religious practices which took too much

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[86] Frankfort, op. cit., p. 254.

[87] Roux, op. cit., p. 311.

[88] Ibid., p. 312.

[89] Moscati, op. cit., p. 64.

[90] Ibid.

of his time."[91] Indeed, even among the peoples of the ancient Near East, the Assyrians and Babylonians were remarkable for the extent to which religion reigned as the dominating influence over every aspect of social life.[92]

EDUCATION

Education in ancient Assyria was both formal and informal in nature. Formal education, however, was limited to those people who ". . . had most need of it, and who were willing and able to sacrifice time and money for it."[93] This meant that such an education was a prerogative of the king, nobility, and the wealthier members of the ummane class, as the poorer groups of society had neither the time nor the money necessary for a formal training. The hupshi and the poorer members of the ummane class thus had an education that was largely informal in nature, as did a majority of slaves, although some of this latter group were trained formally to be scribes.

Over the course of many centuries, the study of literature, religion, law, medicine, science and astrology became widespread throughout Mesopotamia. As a consequence the amount of formal learning in these areas also developed. Most of the schools were taught by priests and scribes, and were apparently held in temples.[94] "Individual instruction,

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[91]Roux, op. cit., p. 310.

[92]Moscati, op. cit., p. 57.

[93]Thomas Woody, Life and Education in Early Societies (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 82.

[94]Contenau, op. cit., p. 175.

oral repetition, and copying of models were probably characteristic methods of teaching."[95] As well as this, the students were probably required to memorize various expressions connected with the branch of affairs in which they were specializing. " 'Knowledge' consisted merely of the capacity to produce without notice phrases appropriate to a given situation, and to have mastered them sufficiently to be able to string them together."[96] Such a formal education prepared youth for the work of scribes, who might be later employed in business, temples, palaces or the army, as copyists, lawyers, teachers, clerks, doctors, priests, or as members of any profession that demanded skill in writing.[97]

There is little direct information concerning the number of such schools, although Woody[98] states that they were numerous, but not large. Although scribes could be drawn from all levels of society, few of the poorer people were able to send their children to school. On the contrary, it appears as though most scribes came from parents of high social status, including children of city and provincial governors and even of royalty.[99] However, certain slaves also attended the temple schools, in order that they could later assist their masters in running a business, as well as enhancing their value.[100] While they were a rarity, female scribes were not unknown.[101]

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[95]Woody, op. cit., p. 82.

[96]Contenau, loc. cit.

[97]Woody, op. cit., p. 83.

[98]Ibid., p. 82.

[99]Contenau, op. cit., p. 174.

[100]Woody, op. cit., p. 82.

[101]Contenau, op. cit., p. 175.

Some, if not all, of the Assyrian kings received very complete education. Thus Ashurbanipal wrote that:

> Marduk, master of the gods, granted me as a gift a receptive mind (lit., wide ear) and ample (power of) thought. Nabut, the universal scribe, made me a present of his wisdom (lit., the possession, grasp, of his wisdom). Urta (and) Nergal endowed my body (lit., form) with strength, vigor and unrivaled power. The art (lit., work) of the Master Adapa I learned (lit., acquired),-- the hidden treasure of all scribal knowledge, the signs of heaven and earth. I was brave, I was exceedingly strong (i.e. industrious), in the assembly of the artisans I received order (?); and I have studied (lit. struggled with) the heavens with the learned masters of oil divination, I have solved the laborious (problems of) division and multiplication, which were not clear, I have read the artistic script of Sumer (and) the dark (obscure) Akkadian, which is hard to master, (now) taking pleasure in the reading of the stones (i.e. steles) (coming) from before the flood, (now) being angered (because I was) stupid (and) addled (?) days: I mounted my steed, I rode joyfully, I went up to the (hunting) lodge (?). I held the bow, I shot (lit. let fly) the arrow, the sign of my valor. I hurled heavy lances like a javelin. Holding the reins like a driver, I made the wheels go round. I learned to handle the aritu and the kababu shields like a heavy-armed bowman (?). I wished to be the great lord (?) of all the craftsmen. At the same time I was learning royal decorum, walking in the kingly ways, I stood before the king, my begetter, giving commands to the nobles.[102]

Such an education, which encompassed many separate areas of knowledge, together with the acquisition of physical skills, may have been representative of the education received by not only the royal family, but also by the more prominent members of the nobility. Although there is a lack of definitive evidence, it is probable that such members of Assyrian society would have received this education in a very formal manner, under the guidance of private tutors.

The lower classes of society used a system of apprenticeship to prepare themselves for their vocation in life. Workmen probably

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[102]Luckenbill, op. cit., pp. 378-379.

taught their trades to their children, and in this way families tended to work in an hereditary profession, all within the same guild or professional organization.[103]

> The women of lower-class families who bore the burden of all household labor, must have trained their daughters by an informal apprenticeship to the physical tasks they were to perform, even as masters trained boys in their shops.[104]

Slaves were apprenticed to trades, sometimes even to another slave who was skilled in such a craft. In Babylonia, the apprentice contract was binding under the law, and penalties were provided for failing to instruct the apprentice according to set requirements.[105] One could well imagine that a similar system existed in Assyria.

The men of Assyria were some of the finest soldiers in the ancient Near East, and to attain this reputation, the acquisition of the skills of warfare must have formed an integral part of their education. It has been noted above,[106] that Ashurbanipal was skilled at driving chariots, riding horses, hurling lances and firing bows, all of which could have been used in battle. Among the upper classes, horsemanship and the use of the bow formed a prominent part of training, but apart from the physical exercise of labor, little can be said on the score of physical training and sports among the lower elements of the population.[107]

In Assyria the type of education received depended largely on the social class of the individual concerned, as formal education was

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[103] Woody, op. cit., p. 84.

[104] Woody, op. cit., p. 85.

[105] Ibid.

[106] See page 32.

[107] Woody, op. cit., p. 90.

restricted almost exclusively to the wealthy sections of the community. The poorer people, both male and female, received a more informal type of apprenticeship training and only rarely did they learn to read and write. However, despite such differences, the type of education received by all classes of society was similar in nature, in that it was very practically oriented, as even the formal literary and scientific learning was largely a preparation for one's vocation in life.

CHAPTER III

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE ANCIENT ASSYRIANS

Introduction

The amount of evidence pertaining to recreational activities in the Assyrian civilization is severely limited. At the present time, most information deals with business documents and contracts found in the ruins of Assur, Nineveh and Kalhu.[1] The information that is available describing the social life of the Assyrians concerns the lives of the kings, their courts, and the wealthier citizens, and consequently do not reflect the life of the average individual. Furthermore, the Assyrian kings, who were responsible for having a great deal of sculpture and other art work completed, were primarily interested in recording scenes from the hunt, the battlefield, Assyrian military victories, and themes associated with religion.[2] Accordingly the descriptions of the recreational activities of the Assyrians are by no means comprehensive, but rather are limited by the amount of available information concerning the subject. Following the actual description of each recreational activity, attempts were made to explain why the Assyrians participated in that specific activity. Particular efforts were made to relate warfare and recreational activities, in an attempt to obtain a more precise understanding of the interrelationship between them.

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[1]Georges Roux, Ancient Iraq (Suffolk: Pelican Books, 1969), p. 306.

[2]Andre Parrot, The Arts of Assyria, trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons (New York: Golden Press, 1961), pp. 35-36.

Banquets and Feasting

There is a considerable amount of evidence to show that banqueting was very popular with the kings of Assyria. However evidence of the lower classes of society participating in this activity is rather limited. On nearly all occasions, banquets were held to celebrate a special event, such as a festival, marriage, military victory or the construction of a city, temple, or palace.

Military victories were occasions which were often celebrated by a banquet. Maspero[3] stated that on the return home after a victory, the king paraded through the city with the captives and booty. He then noted that:

> After the procession, the day is passed in a perfect frenzy of joy by the whole nation. It is customary for all the inhabitants of the city, slaves and freemen, to eat and drink at the king's expense during the festival; this is a method of giving them a share of the booty. For seven days the palace gates are open to all comers.[4]

As Maspero did not state where he obtained this information, it is probable that the above statment is based on what he thought would have occurred. However there is one wall relief which depicted a royal banquet that took place after Ashurbanipal's defeat of the Elamites in 655 B.C.[5] The king and queen are shown drinking wine, while an attendant, standing nearby, is holding food. Further, it is known that Ashurbanipal, while campaigning, celebrated his capture of the city of Aribua

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[3]G. Maspero, Life in Ancient Egypt and Assyria (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1908), p. 368.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Parrot, op. cit., fig. 60.

by holding a feast in the palace of the captured city.[6] In a similar fashion, Shalmaneser III held banquets in captured palaces.[7]

The Assyrian kings sometimes held banquets to entertain visiting diplomats. For example Ashurbanipal, in receiving an envoy from his brother in Babylon, invited ". . . those Babylonians to a sumptuous banquet."[8] This custom was followed only in the case of the most respected visitors. The bas-reliefs show that guests at the banquets were seated in groups of four[9] and were served by a considerable number of servants. One relief depicted a groups of five servants filling drinking vessels with wine from a large wine vase.[10]

Ashurnasirpal II, on the completion of his new palace at Kalhu, held a feast for a large number of people. Part of the menu included:

> 1,000 barley-fed oxen, 1,000 young cattle and sheep from the stalls, 14,000 common (lit., traders;) sheep (from the flocks) belonging to Ishtar my mistress, 1,000 fattened sheep, 1,000 lambs, 500 deer, 500 gazelles, 1,000 large birds, 500 geese, 500 owls, 1,000 suki-birds, 1,000 qarib birds, 10,000 pigeons, 10,000 doves, 10,000 small birds, 10,000 fishes, 10,000 locusts (?), 10,000 eggs, 10,000 loaves, 10,000 (measures of) beer, 10,000 skins of wine. . .[11]

The guest list for the same feast included:

> 47,074 workmen and women summoned from all the districts of my land; 5,000 high officials, the envoys of the Suhi, Hindanaeans,

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[6] D. D. Luckenbill, Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia, Vol. I. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926), p. 166.

[7] Ibid., p. 222

[8] Ibid., Vol. II, p. 301.

[9] J. Bonomi, Nineveh and its Palaces (London: Illustrated London Library, 1852), p. 188.

[10] Ibid., p. 187.

[11] D. Wiseman, "A New Stela of Assur-Nasir-Pal II," Iraq, XIV: Spring, 1952, pp. 31-32.

> Hattinaeans, Hittites, Tyrians, Sidonians, Gurgumeans, Malideans, Hubuskaeans, Gilzanians, Kumeasn, Masasiraeans, 16,000 persons (souls) of Kalhu, 1,500 zarequ-officials of all ny palaces. The total was 69,574. The happy p ople of Kalhu for ten days I feasted, wined, bathed, anointed and honoured them and then sent them back to their lands in peace and joy.[12]

There is another instance of a huge banquet having been given, this time by Sargon, to celebrate the accession to the Urartian throne of an Assyrian puppet king. In this case, Sargon stated that a banquet was spread for the whole city.[13]

Maspero mentioned a banquet that was held in connection with a marriage between the children of two wealthy merchants. While wedding banquets almost certainly took place, Maspero did not quote original sources, and therefore his statement cannot be accepted as being more than an intelligent guess.[14]

Feasting was also mentioned in connection with religious beliefs. Sennacherib stated that he was inspired to build a temple for the New Year's Feast.[15] He also noted that a feast or banquet was held for Ashur, the king of the gods.[16] On the other hand, the Book of Jonah mentioned that for religious reasons, the Assyrian kings proclaimed a fast, which both man and beast had to follow.[17] As will be seen below, feasting was also related to events of religious significance such

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[12]Wiseman, op. cit., p. 32.

[13]Luckenbill, op. cit., p. 94.

[14]Maspero, op. cit., p. 231.

[15]Luckenbill, op. cit., p. 184.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Jonah 3: 5-9.

as festivals.[18]

As is shown by the relief of Ashurbanipal mentioned on page music was often played at banquets. Ashurbanipal is shown celebrating with his queen, and is being entertained by harpists, flutists and drummers.[19]

It would thus appear as though banquets and feasts were important social functions in the lives of the Assyrians. They were commonly held to celebrate important military victories, or to mark the end of a campaign. Apart from this they were also held to celebrate festive occasions and were sometimes of religious significance.

Boxing and Wrestling

No conclusive evidence was found to show that boxing and wrestling were participated in as recreational activities in ancient Assyria. However, ancient literature clearly reveals that unarmed combat was known in ancient Mesopotamia.

> They met in the Market-of-the-Land
> Enkidu barred the gate
> With his foot,
> Not allowing Gilgamesh to enter.
> They grappled each other,
> Holding fast like bulls.
> They shattered the doorpost,
> As the walls shook.[20]

That the Assyrians were familiar with this literature cannot be doubted, for many copies of the Epic of the mythical Gilgamesh have been excav-

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[18] See page 83.

[19] E. Strommenger, 5,000 Years of the Art of Mesopotamia, trans. Christina Haglund (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1964), pl. 241.

[20] James B. Pritchard (Ed.), The Ancient Near East (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), p. 50.

Plate I Swimmers attempting to escape from Assyrian archers.

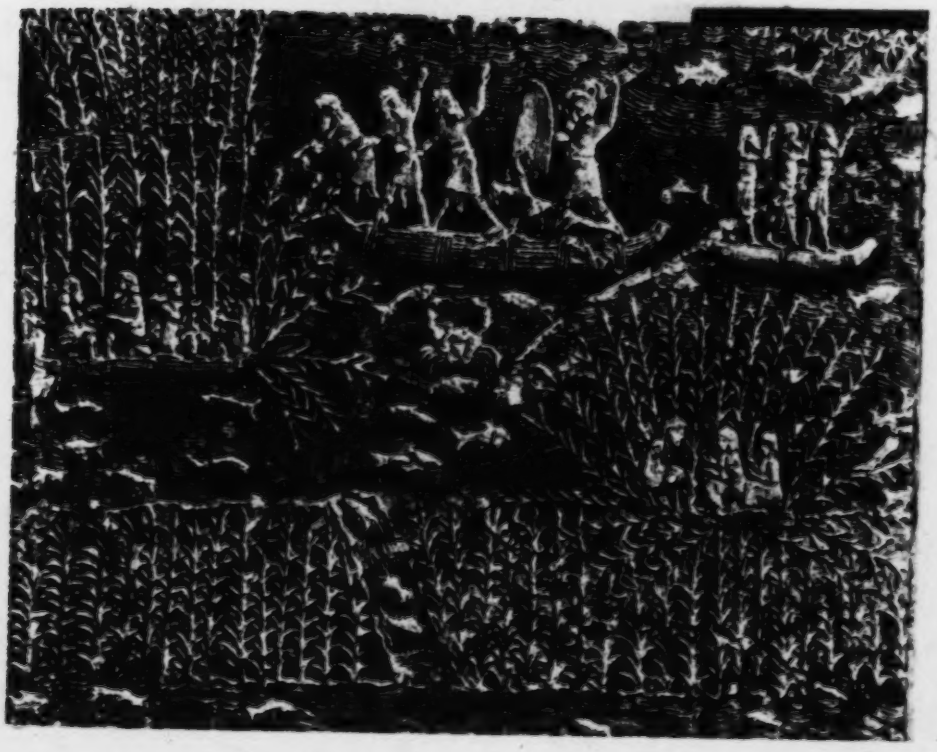

Plate II Assyrian warfare in marshland areas.

ated at Nineveh, where they were once a part of the library of Ashurbanipal.[21] Thus although there was no direct evidence to show that the Assyrians participated in boxing and wrestling, the above reference seems to suggest that they were at least familiar to the Assyrians.

As the Assyrians soldiers were very well armed, it is doubtful if unarmed combat would have been very common in the battles of the time. Despite this, it is quite possible that boxing and wrestling may have been participated in as a means of preparing men for much of the physical contact involved in warfare.

However, from the available evidence, it was not possible to make any definite statements regarding participation in wrestling and boxing, apart from the fact that they were known to the Assyrians.

Dance

There was very little information available in the significance of the dance in ancient Assyria. One bas-relief depicted chariots returning from battle, and soldiers dancing with the heads of the slain.[22] Another relief showed two figures wearing lions' masks and dancing to the accompaniment of music being played on a tamboura.[23] A final relief depicted a line of four beardless men advancing to the right and clapping their hands. They were followed by a more diminutive figure

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[21] Pritchard, op. cit., p. 40.

[22] C. J. Gadd, The Stones of Assyria. The Surviving Remains of Assyrian Sculpture. Their Recovery and their Original Positions (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936), p. 135.

[23] Bonomi, op. cit., p. 227.

wearing an animal mask and a strange cloak.[24]

The first relief described above refers to men celebrating after a military victory. One can well imagine that when victorious armies returned home, people would have celebrated by dancing and singing. Similarly, although we have no evidence to support the theory, it is almost certain that dancing formed part of the celebrations at weddings and other festive occasions.

The second relief is probably of religious significance, as is the third. However in general there was insufficient evidence to fully explain the significance of dance in Assyrian society.

Singing

Singers, like musicians, were very popular in ancient Assyria, and are usually mentioned in connection with religious and festive occasions. Some singers were trained from an early age,[25] while others, already trained, were captured during militray campaigns. Both female and male singers are known to have existed.

Some historians have hypothesized that the Assyrians had a system of musical notation. They based their beliefs on a tablet, dating to the ninth centufy B.C., that was found at Assur. The cuneiform inscription on the tablet was engraved in three columns, two of which contained a Sumerian hymn and its Assyrian translation, while scholars are of the opinion that the third column probably provided the musical notation.[26]

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[24] C. J. Gadd, The Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum, (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1934), p. 44.

[25] Maspero, op. cit., p. 242.

[26] Parrot, op. cit., p. 313.

Singers, as well as instrumental musicians, were often taken from the courts of defeated peoples. Sennacherib, after entering Babylon, mentions returning to Assyria with male and female singers that were taken from the palace of Merodachbaladan.[27] Ashurbanipal, during his eighth campaign, which was against Dananu, a certain king, returned home with the defeated king's wife, sons, daughters, concubines and male and female singers.[28] Further, on his return to Nineveh, the king was greeted by singers and musicians.[29] As will later be mentioned,[30] Esarhaddon, after returning to Nineveh victorious, states that he paraded through the public square accompanied by music and singing.

It is highly probable that singers attended weddings, banquets and other festive occasions. The upper classes of society would have hired groups of singers, while the less privileged groups would have had friends to provide songs.

Although there are not many references to singers participating in religious ceremonies, the information that is available would lead us to believe that the singers played important roles in such rituals. For example, in the New Year's Festivals, the priests recited prayers and incantations, and the temple singers were required to do the same.[31] Thus it appears as though in this ceremony at least, and probably in

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[27] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 116.

[28] Ibid., p. 334.

[29] Ibid.

[30] See page 50.

[31] Pritchard, op. cit., p. 333.

many others, singing played an important part of the necessary ritual.

Singing and instrumental music were often, although not always, performed together, and played very similar roles in the lives of the Assyrian people. However although both music and singing are known to have been popular on festive occasions, and were important in religious ceremonies, as well as performing minor roles in warfare, we have no evidence that singing was used to urge labourers to work harder as was the case with the instrumental music.

Music

There is a considerable body of evidence to show that music was very popular among the ancient Assyrians. They were familiar with numerous string, wind, and percussion instruments, which were used either solo, or in small orchestras. The Assyrians seem to have employed music chiefly for festive and religious purposes, although their use on other occasions was not unknown.

Harps, of which there were two main types, were one of the most popular kinds of instrument. One type, found mainly in earlier reliefs, was triangular in shape, had eight to ten strings, and was played with a quill or plectrum.[32] The later harps, although still triangular in shape, had more strings, sometimes as many as seventeen, and were played by using both hands, without the use of a plectrum.[33]

Three varieties of the lyre are seen in the Assyrian sculptures. One type, found only in the latest reliefs, is roughly triangular in

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[32] G. Rawlinson, The Seven Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World, (New York: Continental Press, 1875), p. 449.

[33] Ibid., p. 306.

shape, and had only four strings.[34] A second lyre was rectangularly shaped, and had eight to ten strings. The instrument was attached to a band, which passed around the musician's neck, and was played by both hands.[35] The third type of lyre was larger, and more elaborate than the others, its frame being constructed of curved wood. The strings in this particular lyre varied in length, and apparently numbered five or seven.[36]

Yet another stringed instrument that was familiar to the Assyrians was the tamboura, which resembled the modern-day guitar, except that it had a relatively small hollow body and a very long neck or handle. The relief depicting this instrument showed neither the number of strings on the instrument, nor the exact manner in which it was played, although it appears as though both hands were used.[37]

A psaltery was also used, this apparently consisting of a comparatively large number of strings stretched over a hollow case or sounding board.[38] The musician seems to have struck the strings with a small bar or hammer, while at the same time making use of his other hand to press the strings in order to produce the correct note.

Double pipes were commonly represented in Assyrian reliefs.[39] However, there is no reference to the single pipe, which is somewhat surprising in view of the fact that this type of instrument was common

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[34] Ibid., p. 449.

[35] Ibid., p. 456.

[36] Ibid., p. 457.

[37] Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 457.

[38] Parrot, op. cit., p. 311.

[39] Ibid., pp. 310-311.

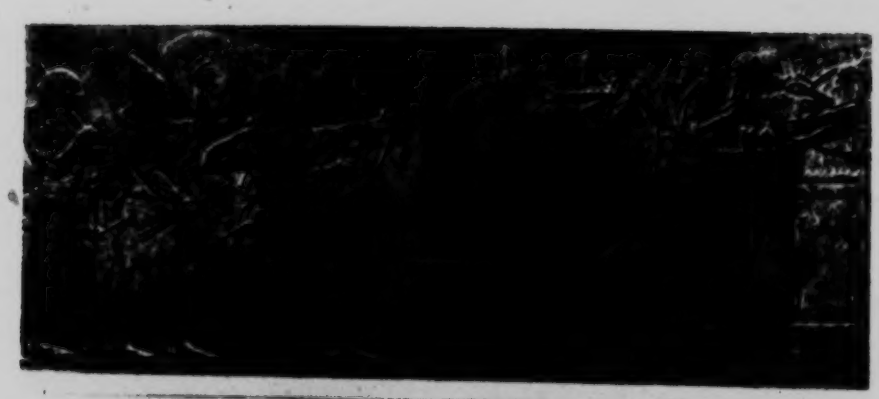

Plate III Assyrian siege of an enemy city. Note the "war machine" breaching the city walls.

Plate IV Spectators gathering on a hillside to watch a royal hunt.

in Egypt.[40] The Assyrian pipes were short in length, and both pipes appeared to be of the same length, unlike those of the Greeks and Romans, who were able to produce notes of different pitch because one pipe was shorter than the other.[41]

Another wind instrument that the Assyrians may have used was a horn. The only reference that we have to such an instrument is on a relief from the time of Sennacherib, which showed a man with an object which is obviously a speaking trumpet or a horn similar to the military trumpet of the Greeks and Romans.[42] As the shape of the object is such that it would have been difficult for a man to effectively shout into, it may indeed have been a horn that was used to give signals to labourers.

The Assyrian tambourine was round in shape, and appeared to be constructed of a skin stretched over a circular frame. Unlike the modern instruments, they did not appear to have the metal rings or balls which produce a jingling sound.[43] It was played by being held in one hand and struck at the side by the fingers.[44]

Cymbals consisted of two hemispheres of metal running off to a point which was elongated into a bar or handle.[45] The musician grasped a cymbal in each hand and clashed them together horizontally or ver-

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[40] Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 307.

[41] Ibid., p. 308.

[42] Ibid., p. 461.

[43] Parrot, op. cit., p. 309.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 461.

tically.[46] (See plate XII.)

The Assyrians used three different types of drums. One was the small tabor which was carried in front, against the stomach of the player, and beaten with the fingers of both hands.[47] The second type of drum had a relatively large top, but narrowed down in the shape of a descending cone.[48] Kettledrums were often mentioned by the Assyrian kings, but we know little about their structure or how they were played.[49]

Finally, Rawlinson[50] mentioned a type of rattle that is shown in a relief from the time of Sennacherib. He described the rattle, which was being carried by a musician, as a type of hollow box of wood or metal, which probably contained stones. The instrument was probably shaken to produce a noise which corresponded to the sound emitted by the side-rings of a modern tambourine.

Most of the bas-reliefs depicting musical scenes showed bands of musicians playing. The bands were variously composed, the simplest consisting of two men playing harps.[51] More common were groups of three and four players.[52] (See plates XV and XVI.) From the available evidence, it appears that bands with more than four musicians were relatively uncommon. The largest band for which we have evidence was composed of

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[46] Parrot, loc. cit.

[47] Ibid., p. 310.

[48] Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 460.

[49] Leroy Waterman, Royal Correspondence of the Assyrian Empire, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1930-1936), Vol. II, pp. 612, 669 and 1,092.

[50] Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 309.

[51] Ibid., p. 310.

[52] Ibid., p. 311.

ten players.[53]

The Assyrians seemed to have employed music chiefly for religious and festive purposes, although military bands were not unknown. (See plate XII.) The beating of a kettle drum was a part of the ritual associated with the New Year's Festival at Babylon,[54] and indeed there was a complicated procedure to follow when the temple kettle drums were covered.[55] Another incident where music was used in a ritual having religious significance was after the royal hunts, when the king poured libations over his victims.[56] King Ashurbanipal was shown in such a scene, accompanied by two musicians who were playing harps.[57] Yet another relief depicted a remarkable scene of two strangely-attired figures dancing next to a musician who was playing a tamboura.[58] The dancers are wearing lion masks, and one is carrying a whip. It is very probable that both their guise and the celebration in which they are participating had a religious significance which is not now explicable.[59] A piece of ivory work found by Loftus at Nimrud in 1855 shall be taken as a final illustration of the fact that musical instruments were used in religious ceremonies. The particular work in mind showed a procession of women playing musical instruments, advancing to worship an enthroned

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[53]Parrot, op. cit., p. 310.

[54]J. B. Pritchard (Ed.), Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 333.

[55]Ibid., p. 334.

[56]See page 73.

[57]Gadd, The Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum, op. cit., p. 49.

[58]Bonomi, op. cit., p. 227.

[59]Gadd, loc. cit.

goddess.[60]

Music was played on festive occasions, such as weddings and banquets. Certainly this was the case with the wealthier sections of society. Probably the poorer people would have managed to obtain an instrument of some type to help make their festivities more enjoyable.

Another occasion that gave rise to a considerable amount of celebration and music was when the army was victorious. One bas-relief showed Ashurbanipal relaxing in a garden, celebrating his victory over the Elamite king Teumann.[61] Ashurbanipal was accompanied by his queen, and harpists, flutists and drummers played in the background. As an aftermath to Ashurbanipal's victory over Teumann, Ummanigash, a refugee Elamite prince, became king, and a striking bas-relief shows a procession of musicians and happy women and children celebrating the accession.[62] The musicians that were visible included harpists, double-pipe players, and a man with a tabor. Esarhaddon, after defeating and killing two enemy kings, had their heads cut off and carried through Nineveh. "That the might of Assur, my lord, (might be made manifest), (I hung their heads) upon the shoulders of their nobles (and with singing) and music (I paraded through) the public square (of Nineveh).[63] Sargon, after a battle in which he defeated the forces of Urartu, stated that he returned to his camp with ". . . joyful heart and jubilation,

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[60] R. D. Barnett, A Catalogue of the Nimrud Ivories in the British Museum (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1957), p. 189.

[61] Strommenger, op. cit., p. 241.

[62] Parrot, op. cit., p. 310.

[63] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 206.

Plate V Attendant releasing lion from cage into enclosed hunting area.

Plate VI King hunting lions from a chariot.

Plate VII Ashurnasirpal II hunting lions from a chariot. Note the use of the composite bow.

accompanied by players (on) the harp and tambourine."[64]

The Assyrian kings used music to urge their men on in battle.[65] One relief from the time of Ashurbanipal shows a register of foot soldiers clapping their hands, and possibly singing as they file past towards the battle. In the same scene were horsemen and archers actually engaged in battle, while four musicians played in the background. The musicians were playing a tabor, a lyre or psaltery, cymbals and an eight-stringed lyre.[66]

After many of their campaigns, the kings returned with musicians that had been taken as tribute or booty from the courts of the defeated nations. (See plate XIII.) Thus Sennacherib, after besieging Jerusalem, imposed a crushing tribute on Hezekiah, after he finally surrendered the city. "All kinds of valuable (heavy) treasures, as well as his daughters, his harem, his male and female musicians, (which) he had (them) bring after me to Nineveh, my royal city."[67] The existence of female musicians is mentioned in some of the ancient records. For example, Sennacherib, after entering Babylon, returned to Assyria with ". . . male and female musicians."[68] The fact that the kings recorded the capture of musicians along with princes and other members of royalty helps to underline the popularity of music in ancient Assyria.

Music was also played at some funerals. Maspero[69] mentioned

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[64] Ibid., p. 83.

[65] Parrot, loc. cit.

[66] Parrot, op. cit., p. 310.

[67] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 121.

[68] Ibid., p. 131.

[69] Maspero, op. cit., p. 241.

that on the death of a wealthy merchant, the body was carried to burial, preceded and followed by a group of hired mourners and musicians. On the occasion of the death of a king, possibly Shalmaneser V, a musician and his girl singers performed before a group of dignitaries.[70]

Finally, Ashurbanipal mentioned music being played to encourage labourers to work harder. "Molding its bricks, performing labor upon it, they passed their days to the accompaniment of music.[71] From these numerous references, it is apparent that the playing of musical instruments was very popular in ancient Assyria. It was played at festive occasions, funerals, and during some religious services. Further it was used to urge men on in battle, and formed an important part of the celebrations that were staged when soldiers returned from campaigns.

Boating

The navigation of the two great rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, was important to the Assyrians. In the first instance, it was a military necessity that armies be able to cross such rivers and those tributaries which were too deep to be forded.[72] Although soldiers could swim across streams, the provisions, chariots, siege machines and other equipment had to be ferried across, usually on rafts and boats. Secondly, rivers were used as a means of communication and trade between cities.

Numerous bas-reliefs have been located which clearly showed how

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[70] R. Campbell Thompson, "An Assyrian Parallel to an Incident in the Story of Semiramis," Iraq, IV:part I, Spring, 1937, p. 37.

[71] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 322.

[72] Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 313.

the Assyrians used boats during military campaigns.[73] One type of boat that was so used resembled the Welsh coracles, in that they were constructed of wicker-work, and covered with skins and a coating of bitumen.[74] A second type of boat that was used for the same purpose, was long and comparatively narrow, and rounded off towards the stern and stem. The boats were propelled by oars, or occasionally pushed along by long poles. They were steered either by the oars, or by helmsmen who controlled steering oars that were usually attached to the stern of the boat. Rafts were also used to carry equipment across rivers. These were usually made of trees and bushes, and rendered capable of sustaining a considerable weight by the attachment of a number of inflated animal skins. The top of the raft was sometimes covered with bitumen. Assurnasirpal II made mention of such rafts when he wrote ". . . the chariots and--cavalry I took with me, and on rafts I crossed the Tigris."[75]

Both Assurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III made mention of fighting sea battles in goat-skin boats. The latter king stated that ". . . I followed after them in boats of (goat skins), fought a great battle on the sea, defeated them, and with their blood I dyed the sea like wool."[76] Bas-reliefs have been found depicting warfare in the marshes of Southern Mesopotamia. One of them shows Assyrians firing arrows while standing on boats which appear to be constructed on long pieces of reed or wood bound

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[73] Bonomi, op. cit., pp. 238-239.

[74] Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 314.

[75] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 179.

[76] Ibid., p. 222.

together into a solid mass, and rounded off at one end.[77] A similar relief which depicts Assyrian soldiers searching for and killing enemies hidden among reeds in the marshes.[78] In both reliefs, the boats appear to be solid masses, as the men standing on them do not have their feet below the rim of the craft.

While most of the evidence concerning boats is in connection with warfare, it is known that some Assyrian kings hunted narwhals from boats, in which case boats were also used for recreational purposes.[79] As described above, boats and rafts were used to ferry equipment across rivers, while the former were also used in fighting. Boats were also used as a means of communication between cities and villages, no doubt carrying goods of trade. No evidence has been found of the Assyrians using boats for relaxation or pleasure, although this probably did occur to some extent. However the majority of the population would have had neither the time nor the money to be able to use boats for recreational purposes.

Fishing

Although we do not have a great deal of evidence describing fishing in ancient Assyria, the information that is available seems to suggest that it was a very important the popular activity. One bas-relief showed a man fishing in a small round pond which was fed by a stream.[80] Although no fish hooks have been found during excavations,

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[77] A. H. Layard, Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon (London: John Murray, 1853), p. 585.

[78] Parrot, op. cit., figure 52.

[79] See page 58.

[80] Georges Contenau, Everyday Life in Babylon and Assyria. Trans. by K. R. and A. R. Maxwell-Hyslop (London: E. Arnold, 1954), p. 47.

it is still highly probable that the Assyrians were familiar with them, as both the Egyptians and early Chaldeans make mention of them.[81] The use of a fishing line is also depicted in another relief that is situated on the banks of a river.[82] The man has a fish on the end of his line, and the fish obviously has the line caught in its mouth.

Yet another relief showed a man in the middle of a river fishing while sitting astride an inflated skin.[83] None of the three reliefs mentioned above show any indication that the Assyrians were familiar with the fishing rod. In all cases, the fish were caught by means of a simple line thrown into the water. Evidence has also been found of fishing nets, although the manner in which they were used is not known.[84]

The first relief mentioned shows the fisherman with a basket on his back, into which the fish were placed. Furthermore, the pond is so symmetrical in shape that it could well have been specially constructed for the purpose of commercial fishing, and fed by a branch stream from either a canal or stream.[85]

The kings made no mention of fishing in streams or ponds, as presumably the challenge of this type of fishing was not worthy of their consideration. However some of the kings, namely Tiglathpileser I,

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[81] Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 304.

[82] R. D. Barnett and M. Falkner, The Sculptures of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.) (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1962), p. 175.

[83] Rawlinson, loc. cit.

[84] Contenau, op. cit., p. 47.

[85] Ibid.

Plate VIII Attendant leading a hunting dog.

Plate IX Animals fleeing from hunters. The nets were used to prevent the animals from escaping.

Adadnirari II and Assurnasirpal II all admitted to killing narwhals in the sea.[86] Exactly how they killed or caught these fish is not known.

That fishing was very extensively carried out in Assyria can be verified by referring to the large numbers of fish that were given to the temples, and also by the numbers that were consumed at royal banquets. For example, Assurnasirpal II mentioned that on one occasion when he organized a large feast, no less than 10,000 fish were prepared.[87] Sargon mentioned fish in connection with a religious ceremony in which animals and birds, as well as fish were offered to the gods.[88]

Fishing could have been, and probably was, an activity that provided relaxation for some people. The latter of the two reliefs described above could have depicted such a scene, as the man had no basket in which to keep his catch, and he is fishing from a stream rather than from an artificial pond. Almost certainly the sea-fishing done by the kings was primarily for enjoyment.

However, the main reason for the large amount of fishing that was carried out was economic in nature. Peasants, when they could afford the time, would have fished to supplement their food supply, while there must have been considerable numbers of men who made a living with nets and the sale of their catches.

Swimming

That the Assyrians practiced swimming cannot be doubted. A con-

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[86] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 98, 121, and 189.

[87] Wiseman, op. cit., p. 31.

[88] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 38.

siderable number of reliefs were located which depicted men swimming, either supported or unsupported. Generally, an inflated animal skin was used when an individual could not swim unassisted. Thus plate I shows fugitives fleeing from a group of Assyrians who were pursuing them.[89] Two of the three swimmers were doing a type of side-stroke, with one arm being used to hold a supporting bag. One of these two men had a tube in his mouth, presumably to allow him to keep the bag well inflated. The third man was swimming unassisted, and appeared to be doing a type of crawl stroke.

Numerous reliefs showing Assyrian soldiers swimming across streams have been found.[90] Some of the men were swimming unassisted[91] while others were supported by either inflated skins,[92] or by clinging to the bridles and manes of horses.[93]

It was difficult to assess the popularity of swimming among the ancient Assyrians. However, by examining records and bas-reliefs which depicted warfare, it was possible to obtain some indication. Thus on their campaigns, the Assyrians frequently had to cross rivers, sometimes while they were in flood. Reliefs showed that not all of the men crossed in boats. Probably many of the rank and file had to swim across, either supported or unsupported. Possibly, the youth of Assyria may have realized that if they were required to serve in the army, then almost

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[89] Parrot, op. cit., Pl. 47.

[90] Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 387.

[91] Bonomi, op. cit., pp. 238-239.

[92] Ibid., p. 239.

[93] Ibid., p. 238.

certainly, at some stage, they would have been called upon to swim, and consequently many of them could have taken the trouble to learn to propel themselves in the water, either with or without the use of inflated skins. Further indications of the popularity of swimming were obtained from a study of fishing. As has already been mentioned,[94] some men fished in the middle of a stream while straddling an inflated skin. These fishermen would have to have been able to propel themselves in the water. Thus the numbers of men who learned to swim, for either military or economic reasons, may have been quite large. However, it is not possible to state definitely how many of these men could swim without the aid of inflated skins.

A variety of motives would have prompted the Assyrians to learn to swim. While we have no definite proof that the Assyrians swam for pleasure and enjoyment, it is probable that this was one of the foremost motives. The other reasons relating to why the Assyrians swam have already been discussed above, and only need be briefly mentioned here. First the desirability of soldiers being able to swim would have encouraged many young men to learn, and secondly, many of those who fished or worked in boats would have also at least learned to propel themselves with the aid of an inflated skin.

Horse Riding and Chariot Driving

It is unnecessary to state that there are a large number of reliefs depicting Assyrians riding horses and driving chariots. It is significant to note that only the more privileged classes of society participated in such activities. The poorer classes were unable to

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[94] See page 56.

afford horses, chariots, or the time necessary to become competent at these skills.

That a considerable amount of time was necessary to learn to ride a horse, and more particularly to drive a chariot, can be better appreciated by briefly reviewing the necessary skills. Under the earlier Assyrian kings, the cavalry rode without saddles.

> Instead of allowing their legs to hang naturally down the horses' sides, they draw them up till their knees are on a level with their chargers' backs, the object (apparently) being to obtain a firm seat by pressing the base of the horse's neck between the two knees. The naked legs seem to indicate that it was found necessary to obtain the fullest and freest play of the muscles to escape the inconvenience of a fall.[95]

Later, under the Sargonids, a saddle consisting of a piece of leather, usually fastened to the horse by a single girth strap, was in common use.[96] At no stage were the Assyrians familiar with the use of stirrups. To be able to ride a horse under these circumstances would have required a considerable amount of skill. Then, to effectively draw and fire a bow at the same time would have necessitated long hours of devoted practice.

To learn how to effectively control a chariot would have required just as much, if not more time than was spent in learning to ride a horse. The earlier chariots required the driver to stand supported only by two leather foot supports which, in view of the fact that he had to control the horses, usually over rough terrain, would have been a difficult feat to accomplish. Although later chariots had floors in them, on which the driver stood, the absence of any device that would

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[95] Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 250.

[96] Ibid., p. 251.

have absorbed the shocks caused by driving over bumps would have still made the chariot a difficult vehicle to drive.

It is thus reasonable to assume that some young men of the more privileged groups of society spent a considerable amount of time learning how to either ride a horse, drive a chariot or both. Part of this education would have involved hunting. Possibly horse and chariot races also took place, although we have no records to show that this was the case.

One of the main reasons for participating in these two activities was the preparation for war. The cavalry and chariots were very important divisions of the Assyrian army, and the men who made up these particular contingents were so highly skilled that they must have trained consistently and hard from an early age. During the Sargonid period, when the frequency of warfare was very high, the men of the cavalry and chariot divisions must have become semi-professional soldiers, and a large part of their time would have been spent in training. Hunting was another reason why men would have developed the skills of riding horses and driving chariots. However the hunts in themselves were often used as a preparation for battle. The last important reason for men participating in horse riding and chariot driving was enjoyment. Ashurbanipal provides us with a record of his training in horsemanship, and how he ". . . rode joyfully."[97] This is one of the rare references that we have where an Assyrian king admits that he actually enjoyed himself while he was involved in an activity. Usually their comments and descriptions deal with more serious affairs, and preclude any reference to pleasure or enjoyment.

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[97]Luckenbill, op. cit., p. 379.

Hunting

Records of hunting activities among the ancient Assyrians before 1,100 B.C. are very limited. However, it is certain that for a variety of reasons, hunting was widely practiced by people from all levels of society. The lower classes probably hunted to supplement their meagre diet, while the more privileged social groups participated for relaxation, as part of their education, and occasionally for religious or other motives.

Certainly there was a large supply of game spread over the Mesopotamian plain during the second millennium B.C. Contenau[98] stated that partridges and francolins (a type of Asian partridge) were abundant, although quails were rare in Assyria itself. Wild onagers, gazelles, antelopes, ostriches, deer and rabbits inhabited the plains,[99] while lions, elephants, panthers, wolves, hyenas, foxes, wild boars, jackels and other wild animals also roamed the countryside.[100] Probably the peasants hunted the smaller game and occasionally an antelope or deer, while the nobility would have chased the larger animals. We have no way of determining whether the king and his nobles hunted individually or in larger organized groups.

There are definite indications that wild animals were captured alive[101] and either sold or given to kings, who kept them in captivity.

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[98] Contenau, op. cit., p. 50.

[99] Contenau, op. cit., p. 55.

[100] Roux, op. cit., p. 197.

[101] Roux, op. cit., p. 197.

Plate X (i)

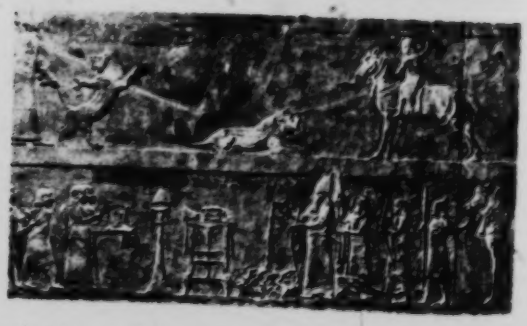

Plate X (ii)

Plate X (iii)

Royal hunting scenes, and religious ceremonies following the completion of the hunt.

Plate XI Young prince hunting birds. The other figure was an instructor, and carried a trained bird of prey.

This was certainly practiced early in the tenth century B.C. by Tiglathpileser I, who had four elephants captured alive and brought to Assur.[102]

Indeed, it is from the annals of Tiglathpileser I (1,115-1,077 B.C.) that we have obtained the first detailed records of hunting activities by an Assyrian king. On one occasion Tiglathpileser, with the use of a powerful composite bow and an iron spear, killed four aurochs (a large European bison, now extinct) in the desert country of Mitanni, ten bull elephants in the district of Harran, 120 lions slain on foot, and 800 lions from his chariot.[103] On the same occasion, he captured four elephants alive, and also mentioned his success in hunting birds.[104] The king later continued to describe how he killed a nahiru (narwhal) in the Mediterranean Sea near the island of Arvad.[105] On yet another occasion, Tiglathpileser slaughtered 360 lions, 240 wild oxen, and six elephants, while he captured alive four elephants, and numerous lions, wild oxen, deer, wild goats, wild asses, gazelles and birds.[106]

It is not yet fully understood what the great king did with the captured animals. We do know that some of the young creatures that were born in captivity were sacrificed to Ashur. Tiglathpileser stated ". . . yearly I offered unto Assur, my lord, such of the young wild

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[102] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 86.

[103] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 86.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., p. 98.

[106] Ibid., p. 116.

creatures which were born from the as my heart prompted me (to choose), together with my pure lambs, for sacrifice."[107] In the capital city of the empire, the king kept wild animals in a type of zoological garden for his amusement as well as that of the common people.[108]

It is also possible that the king used some of the animals for hunting. Tiglathpileser mentioned that the captive animals were given to him by the gods ". . . for the chase."[109] This probably meant that, just as some of his more famous successors did in the seventh century B.C., the king would on special occasions, have large numbers of the captured animals placed in an enclosure where he hunted them.[110] Thus early in the tenth century B.C., we could describe the king's hunting exploits as consisting of the killing and capture of a large variety of animals and birds, while on expeditions, and probably organized hunts in Assur, where captured animals were released into a special enclosure to be slaughtered by the king.

After Tiglathpileser I, we have records showing that successive kings were no less enthusiastic in their approach to hunting. Adad-nirari II (911-891 B.C.) mentioned hunting ". . . in the field,"[111] and also killing dolphins. Tukulti-ninurta II (890-884 B.C.) stated that

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[107] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 87.

[108] Gadd, The Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum, op. cit., p. 44.

[109] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 116.

[110] See page 68 for a complete description of this type of hunt, during the reign of Ashurbanipal.

[111] Luckenbill, op. cit., p. 121.

he hunted next to rivers and there killed aurochs,[112] as well as killing and capturing both deer and birds near the Euphrates.[113] Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.) during an expedition along the Euphrates, claims to have killed fifty aurochs, and captured eight alive, as well as killing and capturing birds.[114] The same king mentioned that he captured wild animals and kept them in special parks, where his subjects were permitted to look at them.

> By my outstretched arm (lit., hand) and impetuous courage, fifteen mighty lions from the mountains and the forests I seized with my hand, and fifty lion-cubs I carried away, and, in the city of Calah and the palaces of my land, put them in cages, and I caused them to bring forth their cubs in abundance. Urmindinash I captured alive with my hands, (and) herds of wild oxen, elephants and lions, and MAL-SHIR-birds, male and female pagate, wild asses, gazelles, stages, asate (wolves?), panthers, and senkurri, all the beasts of plain and mountain, I collected in my city of Calah, letting all the people of my land behold them.[115]

The great popularity of hunting can be better appreciated by studying records of the actual numbers of animals that were killed by kings alone. For example, Ashurnasirpal II claimed that on one occasion he,

> . . . slew 450 mighty lions, and 390 wild bulls I slew with my . . . chariots (and) by my lordly onslaught, I cut (down) 200 ostriches like caged birds and 30 elephants I cast into the pit. 50 live wild bulls, 140 live ostriches, 20 mighty lions with my weapon and my . . . I captured.[116]

Other kings made similar claims, even down to the time of Ashurbanipal. However, due to uncontrolled hunting, the elephant, once relatively

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[112] Luckenbill, op. cit., p. 128.

[113] Ibid., p. 130.

[114] Ibid., p. 163.

[115] Ibid., p. 189.

[116] Wiseman, op. cit., p. 31.

common in Syria, had become almost extinct by 800 B.C. or not long after.[117] Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.) appears to have been the last Assyrian king to have successfully hunted elephants, for after his reign, we hear no more of these animals being chased.

During the first millennium B.C., the Assyrian kings continued to hunt in open country while on expeditions or campaigns, and also in city parks, where the animals were released into a restricted area and then hunted by the king. However, it is of the second type of hunting that we are best informed. Apparently these more formal hunts took place on special occasions, and were well attended by spectators, who no doubt came to regard them as a type of spectacle.

Ashurbanipal (668-631 B.C.) has left us records of how he participated in both types of hunt. Of hunting on the plains he stated:

> In an open space in the plain, fierce lions, dreadful creatures (lit., children) of the mountains, came out. They surrounded the chariot, my royal vehicle. At the command of Assur and Ishtar, the great gods, my lords, . . . my yoke . . . I shattered the might of those lions.[118]

He also mentioned his hunting exploits in the more formal park situation in the city of Nineveh.

> In my lordly sport, they let a fierce lion of the plain out of his cage and on foot, with my spear (?) shaft, I . . . his . . . but did not end his life. At the command of Nergal, king of the plain, who granted me strength (and) valor (lit., manliness), I stabbed him later with my iron girdle dagger and he died (lit., laid down his life).[119]

The royal hunts that were held in the parks of the great cities developed into highly organized spectacles, and could probably be more

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[117] M. E. L. Mallowan, Nimrud and its Remains, Vol. II (London: Collins, 1966), p. 479.

[118] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 392.

[119] Ibid.

Plate XII Assyrian military band.

Plate XIII Assyrian military band.

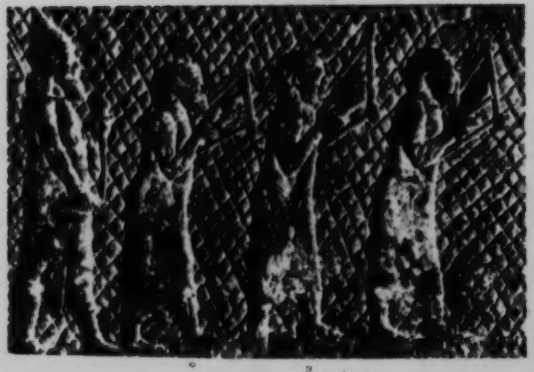

Plate XIV Captured musicians.

aptly described as systematic slaughters. Before the hunts began, crowds of spectators obtained vantage points on nearby hillsides. (See plate IV). The trapped animals were then released from their cages into an area surrounded by soldiers, whose task it was to keep the animals confined within the boundaries of the particular area. (See plate V). Then the king, riding in a chariot, entered the hunting area, and proceeded to shoot the animals as they ran about. (See plates VI and VII). Special men, some mounted, and some on foot, acted as "beaters" herding the animals towards the king to make his task less difficult. Some beaters pricked the animals with their spears,[120] while others used what appeared to be sticks with three pieces of leather or twine attached to one end.[121] (See plate X (ii)). Presumably the beaters could either strike the wild animal with the leather, or simply make "cracking" noises with it. In the chariot with the king were a driver, and one or two guards, whose task it was to protect the king from any animals that might attempt to jump into the chariot. The king also hunted on horseback, and on occasions, on foot.

That the Assyrians were both keen and accomplished hunters is evidenced by the many different approaches they employed to assist them in the chase. As has already been mentioned,[122] the Assyrian kings frequently hunted from chariots, and on these occasions, they were usually armed with the powerful composite bow of the Assyrians, a spear,

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[120] Gadd, op. cit., p. 44.

[121] H. R. H. Hall, Babylonian and Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum (Paris and Brussels: G. Van Oest, 1928), Pl. XLIV.

[122] See page 68.

and a sword and dagger. Normally the king used his bow first to shoot the animals and then, if they were not dead, he would deliver the coup de grace with his spear or sword. When hunting from horseback, the kings were armed with a spear,[123] and on occasions with a bow. (See plate X(i)). On foot, the king used a spear[124] and sometimes a dagger.[125]

Several reliefs have been found which showed Ashurbanipal hunting lions on foot. In one he was depicted transfixing a lion with his sword,[126] while another showed him shooting a lion at close quarters.[127] Finally, he grasped one furious beast by the tail, and killed it by smashing its head with the mace.[128] This last feat, at first sight appears almost too incredible to believe, until we learn that the Mesopotamian lion was a good deal smaller than his African counterpart of today, and also that the king was always accompanied by a guard carrying a shield and a spear.[129]

There was considerable evidence to support the claim that the Assyrians used trained birds and dogs when hunting. One relief that was recovered at Khorsabad from the eighth century B.C. showed two figures, one of whom was shooting birds with a bow and arrow. The other man, armed with a spear, had a trained hawk, falcon, or similar bird of prey

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[123] Parrot, op. cit., p. 54.

[124] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 391.

[125] Ibid., p. 392.

[126] Gadd, op. cit., p. 45.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Ibid.

resting on his arm.[130] (See plate XI) Another similar relief depicted a man with a bird of prey on his arm. The man was carrying small game that could have conceivably been caught by the bird.[131] Other reliefs showed attendants leading large hunting dogs,[132] (see plate VIII) while another depicted a procession of huntsmen, some mounted and others on foot, accompanied by hounds, in pursuit of a group of gazelles.[133] Yet a further relief showed a group of huntsmen and hounds among the undergrowth on the banks of a river.[134] This group was probably searching out lions for the king, who was on a boat in the river, to shoot. A section of another relief carved during the reign of Ashurbanipal showed a herd of wild asses fleeing from the king, and being pursued by large hunting dogs.[135] One dog had caught the rear leg of one of the asses, and was attempting to pull the fleeing animal to the ground.

Finally, the Assyrians used nets and possibly a type of lasso to capture animals. Gadd[136] described one relief which showed a procession of servants leading hounds, and carrying nets, stakes and cords for the snaring of smaller game, such as fallow-deer. Rawlinson[137] described another bas-relief which depicted such animals being trapped

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[130] Parrot, op. cit., p. 62.

[131] Ibid.

[132] Gadd, The Stones of Assyria, Ibid., p. 191.

[133] Ibid., p. 184.

[134] Ibid., p. 186.

[135] Gadd, The Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum, Ibid., p. 45.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 301.

in nets. There was a limited amount of evidence relating to the capture of wild animals by the use of a noose. One relief showed a wild ass that had been captured by a special noose which was passed round the neck of the animal.[138] However, there is some doubt that this method was used, for the wild asses were extremely fleet-footed animals, and the possibility of men getting close enough to slip this particular noose round their necks would have been rather remote.

After the hunt, the bodies of some of the slain animals were taken to one of the temples, where libations were poured over them, and prayers offered. For example Ashurbanipal stated that ". . . the lions which I slew, --the terrible bow of Ishtar, lady of battle, I aimed upon them. I brought an offering, I poured out wine over them."[139]

While the above description has been concerned with the hunting exploits of the kings, it is certain that other classes of Assyrian society would have used very similar weapons and methods when they were hunting. This statement would be particularly applicable to the nobility, many of whom would have participated in the kings' hunting expeditions in the plains. The provincial nobles would have hunted wild animals on their large estates, although it is not known if they imported wild animals alive as was the custom of the kings. The nobility probably hunted from chariots, and on horseback, as during military campaigns, they formed important detachments of the cavalry corps. To drive an Assyrian chariot, and indeed to even shoot a bow with any degree of accuracy from one, must have required a high degree of skill. Further-

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[138] Rawlinson, op. cit., p. 301.

[139] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 391.

more, as the Assyrian charioteers were very skilled, it is highly probable that a considerable amount of their training was obtained from hunting in the chariots. For similar reasons, the members of the nobility who led the cavalry divisions of the army, would have hunted from horseback. Generally, a lack of detailed information prevents us from giving a complete and accurate picture of the hunting activities of the Assyrian nobility.

Our knowledge of the hunting activities of the other classes of society is even more limited. There is a relatively small amount of evidence to support the claim that members of the lower classes trapped birds alive, and sold them to merchants, who in turn either sold or loaned them to the palaces or temples.[140] The method of catching these birds varied. Thus mention is made of catching KUR.GI-birds (possibly cranes) by hand,[141] and King Esarhaddon, in his vassal treaties twice mentioned the use of bronze traps which were used to catch birds.[142] Many of the rural lower classes would have hunted small game such as rabbits, birds, and possibly deer, to supplement their diets. It is also possible that on occasions, when the lions in their particular area attacked flocks and herds and possibly people, the peasants may have been organized into hunting parties to destroy the threat. However, for two main reasons, it is doubtful if they would have hunted lions on other occasions. In the first instance, they would not have had access

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[140] D. Wiseman, "The Nimrud Tablets, 1953", Iraq, XV:136-143, Autumn, 1953, p. 139.

[141] Ibid., p. 142.

[142] D. Wiseman, "The Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon," Iraq, XX: 74-80, 1958, part I, p. 76.

Plate XV

Plate XVI Sides of an ivory box depicting Assyrian musicians.

Plate XVII Banquet scene with musicians playing in the background.

to chariots and other elaborate equipment used by the kings to help make the hunt safer, and secondly, they were required to work long hours, and would not have had the time to organize a large-scale hunt. If this was indeed the case, then the weapons used by the peasantry would have been the bow and the sling. The spear, which was used mainly for larger game, would not have found as much use amongst the poorer people. Thus, apart from chasing small game which was either sold or eaten, the hunting activities of the lower classes of Assyrian society were limited in extent.

It is thus clearly evident that hunting was a very popular activity among the Assyrians. Furthermore, upon close examination of the ancient records, it becomes apparent that hunting was pursued not merely for pleasure, but for a variety of other motives as well, including religious beliefs, as a part of a youth's education, for economic reasons, and as a preparation for war. On many occasions those who followed the chase did so because of a combination of two or more of the above reasons.

This was particularly so with the hunting activities of the kings. The formal hunts that took place in the main cities of the kingdom would have undoubtably been enjoyable occasions for the kings. Ashurbanipal described how ". . . for my pleasure"[143] he slew many lions, and also how during his education at a hunting lodge, he ". . . rode joyfully."[144] As well as this, the king, as head of the Assyrian state, and as the earthly representative of Ashur, the chief Assyrian god, liked to prove

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[143] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 391.

[144] Ibid., p. 379.

himself invincible, and one way that he could do this was to kill large numbers of fearsome, wild animals, particularly lions. Thus Ashurbanipal claimed that he was a ". . . mighty hunter before the lord,[145] and described in detail how he killed many lions. For example on one occasion, while on foot, he ". . . seized a fierce lion of the plain by his ears"[146] and then killed the beast with his spear, and in another instance ". . . seized a lion of the plain by his tail,[147] and ". . . smashed his skull with the club of my hand."[148] The constant desire to display courage was a marked characteristic of many Assyrian kings, and was an important reason for their participating in the hunt. Ashurbanipal was probably the most prominent of these "hunting" kings, and claims that he was a great hunter because ". . . Assur, king of the gods (and) Ishtar, lady of battle, have decreed a life (lit., destiny) of heroism"[149] for him.

At the same time the kings invariably praised their gods who gave them the power to hunt. Ashurbanipal acknowledged that Ashur and Ninlil endowed him with ". . . surpassing might,"[150] while Adad-nirari II claimed that Ninurta and Nergal granted him his hunting skills.[151] That the Assyrian kings realized their duty to their gods is also illustrated by the fact that after the hunts some of the dead animals

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[145] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 391.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid., p. 392.

[148] Ibid.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid., p. 391.

[151] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 121.

were taken to the temples, and there the king poured a libation over them.[152] (See plate X (iii)). It is not yet fully understood if the Assyrian kings felt that it was a religious duty to hunt, and consequently whether or not some hunts were entirely of religious significance. Tukulti-ninurta II stated that Ninurta and Nergal commanded him to follow the chase,[153] and Assurnasirpal II made similar claims. However later kings, including Ashurbanipal, seemed to have followed the chase to prove their worth as the earthly representative of Ashur, but freely acknowledged that they owed their skill to the gods. Regardless of whether or not some of the kings' hunts were entirely of religious significance, the fact remains that hunting was related to religious beliefs.

It is not known whether other members of the nobility made similar offerings to the gods after their hunts. The nobles that did hunt may have obtained priests to do the task, as unlike the king, these nobles were not high priests. For their part, the lower classes may have given part of their catches to the temples. However we can but hypothesize as to what religious emphasis the nobility and lower classes attached to hunting.

The nature of hunting was to some extent, dependent on the social class of the individual involved. Thus unless it was to protect their ruler, no one but the king was permitted to kill animals in the formal type of hunt that took place in the city of the king's residence. No doubt the nobility would have organized hunts of a similar nature,

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[152] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 391.

[153] Ibid., Vol. I, p. 133.

but on a smaller scale. Further, the privileged classes of society would have hunted more for enjoyment than would have the peasants, who may have had to hunt to earn a living. In this respect, the nature of hunting in ancient Assyria was strongly influenced by social factors.

The economic significance of hunting varied according to social class. For example some members of the middle classes earned a living from hunting. Wiseman[154] in discussing some tablets found at Nimrud, mentioned an Assyrian money-lender who also lent birds. On one occasion the individual concerned loaned some 230 doves and some cranes for a period of two months.[155] The money-lender apparently obtained the birds as part of the interest on other loans. He mentioned advancing one person ten shekels of silver that had to be repaid together with two cranes ". . . caught with his own hand in the month of Iyyar.[156] Wiseman is of the opinion that there was a strong demand for live birds which were used for divination purposes, and also for dead ones which were eaten at royal banquets.[157] If this was the case, many lower class people could have survived by hunting such birds, and numerous "middle men" such as the money-lender mentioned above would have prospered through this business.

As has already been mentioned,[158] the lower classes may have hunted small game as a means of supplementing their diet. This could

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[154] Wiseman, "The Nimrud Tablets, 1953," op. cit., pp. 136-143.

[155] Ibid., p. 136.

[156] Ibid., p. 142.

[157] Ibid., p. 136.

[158] See page 74.

certainly be said to be a case of hunting for economic reasons, but when discussing the royal hunts, it is difficult to state that they were of economic significance. While on military campaigns, the king and his nobles used to hunt, and quite probably some animals such as deer were eaten by the army. It is not known whether the animals killed in the more formal city hunts were eaten. Probably the lions were not, although others may have been served at the royal banquets, or given to the palace servants.

Hunting also formed an integral part of the education of the Assyrian kings.[159] Apart from learning the ways of the hunt, the kings would also have used these occasions to develop their skills with the weapons of war. Although there is very direct evidence to support this view, it is highly probable that it was indeed the case. Ashurbanipal provides some support to this hypothesis when he stated that part of his education took place at a hunting lodge, where he learned to shoot a bow, throw a spear, drive a chariot, and handle shields ". . . like a heavy-armed bowman."[160] The reference to the heavy-armed bowman almost certainly refers to a bowman in battle, as the archers that participated in the hunts of Ashurbanipal did not carry large shields. The view that the kings used hunting to develop the physical skills used in warfare would be further supported by the fact that practice on moving objects would have been a necessity if an individual was to be prepared for battle.

Similar claims could be made for the other classes of society.

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[159] See page 32.

[160] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. II., p. 379.

As each Assyrian youth realized that it was highly likely that he would be called into the army, the probability of some of his education being the development of the skills of warfare through hunting would have been very high. This statement is supported by the great success enjoyed by the Assyrian armies, which were all well trained in the physical skills of warfare.

The kings' hunts during military campaigns probably best exemplify the various motives that the Assyrians had for hunting. Firstly, such hunts would have provided relaxation and enjoyment. Secondly they would have helped to feed the army, although the main responsibility for this lay with the provincial governor through whose territory the army was passing. Thirdly, the kings would have offered the usual libations to the gods after the hunt, and finally the hunts would have been used to help keep the participants prepared for battle.

Thus it is not possible to provide an all-encompassing reason that would satisfactorily explain why the Assyrians hunted. Rather the answer for the popularity of this activity must be sought in a combination of social, religious, and economic factors, together with the necessity of educating men in the ways of warfare.

Zoological Gardens

From the time of Tiglathpileser I, there exist records showing how the Assyrian kings captured wild animals alive, and returned them to the cities of the kingdom, where they were placed in zoological gardens.[161] As well as capturing deer, stags and ibex,[162] the kings

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[161] Gadd, The Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum, op. cit., p. 44.

[162] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 87.

caught more dangerous animals. Thus Adad-nirari II boasts that ". . . four live elephants I captured. Five ashkippu I captured. Lions, wild oxen, elephants, deer, wild goats, wild asses, gazelles, MAL-SHIR-birds. Herds of them I gathered into cages(?)."[163]

Tukulti-ninurta II and Ashurnasirpal II also stated how they captured wild animals and birds alive.[164] The latter king stated that his subjects were permitted to view the animals.

> Herds of wild oxen, elephants and lions, and MAL-SHIR-birds, male and female pagate, wild asses, gazelles, stags, asate (wolves?), panthers, and senkurri, all the beasts of plain and mountain, I collected in my city of Calah, letting all the people of my land behold them.[165]

He also made mention of collecting ostriches and apes, as well as the other animals previously mentioned.[166] The above statement by Tukulti-ninurta saying how he let all the people watch the animals, makes it clear that not only did the kings and nobility amuse themselves by looking at the strange creatures, but the lower classes of society were also permitted to look at them.

The popularity of these zoological gardens was such that in the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, they were established not only in Calah, the capital city, but in all ". . . the palaces of my land."[167] Further, animals were often brought as presents by subject princes, and such gifts were always assured of a good welcome.[168] Two reliefs from

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[163] Ibid., p. 116.

[164] Ibid., pp. 130 and 163.

[165] Ibid., p. 189.

[166] Wiseman, "A New Stela of Assur-Nasir-Pal II," op. cit., p. 31.

[167] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 116.

[168] Gadd, The Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum, op. cit., p. 44.

the time of Ashurbanipal showed the animals in captivity. One showed a lion peacefully walking beside two harpists, apparently tamed by the music, while the other depicted a lion and lioness sitting among palm trees, cypresses, vines and flowers.[169]

The enjoyment that the king and his subjects gained from looking at the many different wild animals was almost certainly the main reason for the existence of such zoological gardens. Another possible reason is that some of the animals may have been used in the kings' hunts, and finally, as has already been mentioned,[170] some of the younger animals were sacrificed to the gods.

Religious Festivals

In ancient Mesopotamia, festivals celebrating events of religious significance were frequently held. By studying the ritual that was observed at such festivals, information regarding the recreational activities involved sometimes becomes more apparent. For example, feasting and music were commonplace at these festivals. Further, in some civilizations, the only reference to certain recreational activities is to be found in a description of a religious festival. This is certainly true of the ancient Assyrians, who apparently did not mention foot races anywhere but in relation to the New Year's Festival.

Indeed the New Year's Festival in Assyria and Babylonia contained numerous references to recreational activities. Part of the ceremony was a mimetic combat between the divine champion and the

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[169]Gadd, The Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum, op. cit., p. 44.

[170]See page 74.

Dragon.[171] In Assyria this battle was between the god Ashur, and Tiamat, the dragon. The exact nature of this battle is not fully understood. Possibly, as was the case with the Hittites, it took the form of a mock battle fought between two companies of men.[172] Hooke[173] is of the opinion that the battle may have taken place between the king and a lion.[174] However, as these ritual combats were intended to closely represent the historic encounter between Ashur and the Dragon, they probably took the form of a battle between two individuals. Who the individuals were, and whether or not they were armed is not known. Foot races were a standard feature of the New Year ceremonies at Babylon,[175] and if this was the case, then the Assyrians would certainly have been familiar with this activity as many of the later kings took an active part in the main religious ceremonies of Babylon, including the New Year's Festival.[176]

Another part of the festival was a feast of communion, which apparently took the form of a regalement to the gods.[177] Once a year the Assyrian kings invited the gods to a banquet, and invoked them to

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[171] Theodor H. Gaster, Thespis (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1961), p. 63.

[172] Gaster, op. cit., p. 267.

[173] S. H. Hooke, Babylonian and Assyrian Religion (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1948), p. 60.

[174] See page 27.

[175] Gaster, op. cit., p. 40.

[176] Roux, op. cit., p. 311.

[177] Gaster, op. cit., p. 64.

bless the city, land, king and people.[178] It is not certain if this ceremony was part of the New Year's Feast, or was a separate religious festival.

A sacred pantomime, in which a god was portrayed as having sunk into the netherworld, was also performed at the New Year's Feast.[179] As part of the ritual, the god was mourned, and subsequently he returned to earth. While pantomimes were a common phenomenon of numerous religious festivals, it is not known whether they were performed on non-religious occasions, or if they ever depicted more secular themes.

The New Year's Festival had numerous other important rituals, including a suspension of the normal order of society, when slaves enjoyed a short-lived authority over their masters, and a temporary king was appointed.[180] On the fifth day of the festival, the temple was ceremonially purged,[181] while on the sixth day a condemned criminal was paraded along a street and beaten about the head.[182] This latter ceremony was a means of removing blight and contagion from the entire community by the dispatching of a scapegoat.[183] Another part of the Festival saw the formal disposition and reinstatement of the king, while this was followed by a sacred marriage, in which the king played the

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[178] Gaster, op. cit., p. 64.

[179] Ibid.

[180] Ibid., p. 62.

[181] Ibid.

[182] Ibid., p. 63.

[183] Ibid.

part of the bridegroom.[184] The latter ritual was probably performed to stimulate the growth of vegetation, promote human fertility, and relume the sun.[185]

Judging by the above description of the New Year's Feast, which was celebrated during the first eleven days of the year, Assyrian religious festivals were very important events, and involved the enacting of a considerable number of rituals. Of particular interest are the feasts, pantomimes, mock combats, and ceremonial races, all of which provide us with a deeper insight into the recreational activities of the Assyrians. Although the four abovementioned activities were performed entirely for religious reasons during these festivals, it is possible that the Assyrians did practice them on more secular occasions. Further, although many religious rituals were related to warfare,[186] no evidence was found that religious festivals were held before or after military campaign.

Dice

Only one reference to dice has been found in the ancient records of Assyria. This is in the annals of Sargon, who when he conquered Urartu, sacked the capital city of his foes, and included in the booty were ". . . dice, heavy, light, and small."[187] We have no indication as to the popularity of dice among the ancient Assyrians, although they

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[184] Gaster, op. cit., p. 63.

[185] Ibid.

[186] See pages 28 and 29.

[187] Luckenbill, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 26.

were probably commonly used by children and men from all groups of society. One would suspect that soldiers in particular, would have used them as a means of diversion while on campaigns.

Gaming Boards

Excavations have clearly revealed that the ancient Assyrians were familiar with gaming boards. Most of the boards that have been found closely resembled ones that were used in Egypt, although one resembled the boards that were found during excavations of the Royal Cemetery at Ur.

The gaming boards that resemble the Egyptian ones all seem to have been in use during or shortly after the reign of Esarhaddon. This can be explained by the fact that Esarhaddon was the first Assyrian conqueror of Egypt, and upon seeing the boards in Egypt, probably ordered his own craftsmen to make a number of them.[188] Certainly it appears as though large numbers of the boards were constructed at Nineveh during the reign of this king. The boards were roughly rectangular in shape, although only one of the short sides was straight, all of the others being curved.[189] As to the holes, there was a line down the center.[190] The holes were arranged in groups so that in all but one particular area, four ordinary holes occurred between special holes, which were always distinguished either by a mark or an inlay.[191] In addition, most of the Assyrian boards had ornamental animal groups

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[188] C. J. Gadd, "An Egyptian Game in Assyria," Iraq, I: p. 50.

[189] Gadd, op. cit., p. 45.

[190] Ibid.

[191] Ibid.

standing on one end of the board.

The method in which the game was played is not understood. Although no playing pins have been found in Assyria, a set of ten carved ivory pins, with heads of dogs and jackals was found in Egypt, and presumably the Assyrian game also made use of similar pins.[192] Van Buren[193] is of the opinion that dice must have been thrown to determine the moves in the game, and the pins or pegs were moved accordingly. However, apart from some evidence which suggests that one form of the game may have been a type of race, we know nothing of the moves and tactics involved.

The type of board described above was only popular in Assyria during the time of Esarhaddon,[194] although the discovery of similar gaming boards at Susa, dating to the twelfth century B.C., suggests that the game may have also been known in Assyria at this time.[195] Gadd stated that the popularity of the game diminished after Esarhaddon, although he did admit that some later gaming boards that were found in Babylonia may have been familiar to the Assyrians.

This it is apparent that gaming boards were at least known to the ancient Assyrians from around the twelfth century B.C., and that their popularity was at its height during the reign of Esarhaddon. Relaxation and enjoyment are almost certainly the only reasons why the Assyrians played these board games.

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[192] Gadd, op. cit., p. 45.

[193] E. D. Van Buren, "A Gaming-Board from Tall Halaf", Iraq, IV: Part I, Spring 1937, p. 12.

[194] Gadd, op. cit., p. 50.

[195] Van Buren, op. cit., p. 12.

Toys

There is very little evidence regarding the existence of toys. Mallowan[196] mentioned that a terracotta head of a duck was found during excavations at Nimrud, and that it may have been a child's toy. Although many such objects have been excavated, they have usually been identified by archaeologists as having been objects of religious significance. Another reason for the lack of evidence of toys is that the Assyrian children may not have had a great deal of time in which to play with toys. A further reason is that many toys would have been constructed from wood, and these particular objects have not survived to this day. More excavations are necessary before we can make more definite statements about the popularity and use of toys in ancient Assyria.

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[196] Mallowan, op. cit., p. 432.

CHAPTER IV

ASPECTS OF THE ANCIENT IRANIAN CIVILIZATION

GEOGRAPHY

Modern-day Iran is a large plateau-like area flanked on the east by Afghanistan and West Pakistan, to the north by the Caspian Sea and the Soviet Union, by Iraq in the west, and by the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea to the south. These frontiers were established during the nineteenth century, but on numerous occasions throughout the history of Iran, they extended far beyond their present limits. However the Iranian plateau is usually considered to be the region that constituted the homeland of the ancient Iranians. The geographical position of Iran has long made it a vital land bridge for communication between Far Eastern Asia and the lands of the Mediterranean and Europe. This advantageous position meant that for hundreds of years, the trade routes between the Far East and the West crossed northern Iran, and consequently the country has long been influenced by cultures of both the East and the West.

In general terms, the topography of Iran is best described as being a high plateau, some 4,000 feet above sea level. The plateau is intersected by chains of mountains, the two most prominent of which are the Zagros and the Elburz Ranges. The Zagros chain is situated in southern and western Iran, while the Elburz mountains lie as a great barrier across the north of the country. Both the geographical pos-

ition and physical features of Iran can be seen on Map 2.

Most of the rainfall in Iran resulted from the passage of atmospheric depressions moving east from the Mediterranean Sea and was confined mainly to the winter months from November to early April. Over most of the Iranian plateau, the average annual rainfall was less than twelve inches, while in the south eastern corner, where the land was largely desert, it amounted to less than five inches. Only in the north western extremity of the plateau, where the rainfall varied from fifteen to thirty five inches per annum, were conditions suitable for dry farming. The mountainous areas enjoyed higher rainfalls throughout the year, and varied from forty to sixty inches per annum.. Temperatures throughout Iran were mild in winter and hot during the summers, although extremes did occur. For example in the desert regions the temperatures climbed to well over the 100^{o} mark, while in the high snow-capped mountains the temperatures fell well below freezing point during the winters.

Under such physical conditions, farming was severely restricted. Even in the north west, rain-fed agriculture was ". . . poorly productive and hazardous."[1] Indeed in all areas of Iran, the poor reliability of rainfall made irrigated crops far more productive than in regions where dry-farming was practised. Thus a considerable amount of farmland in ancient Iran was situated in close proximity to major rivers. Today these rivers, such as the Helmand, Zayandeh Rud and the Qum

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[1] H. Bowen-Jones, "Agriculture," in The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. I, Ed. by W. B. Fisher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 571.

are still being used to irrigate crops. In the mountainous valleys the raising of animals, mainly sheep and goats was carried out, while in the deserts, human settlement was centered around the occasional oasis, where orchards and gardens were able to thrive. However, for the main the limited availability of water in Iran made farming a difficult and hardy means of survival.

Geographically, ancient Iran lay adjacent to Mesopotamia, and the life of Pre-Achaemenid Iran was dominated by military and cultural influences from its western neighbours. The various powers of ancient Iraq dominated the Near East until the fifth century B.C., and certainly influenced the development of Iranian farming, community life, writing, law, art and architecture.[2]

The presence and influence of the highly developed civilization of Mesopotamia, led to the Iranians making persistent incursions to the west. In particular they were lured by the promise of wealth, through both trade and plunder. The Mesopotamians, in particular the Assyrians, attempted to subjugate some of the Iranian groups, such as the Medes, but eventually the Medes completely destroyed the power of Assyria, and then finally, under Cyrus, the Achaemenians conquered Babylon. Thus the presence of a highly advanced civilization to its west, led to a relatively high frequency of warfare between the Mesopotamians and the Iranians, and ultimately resulted in the latter's domination of the land of the two rivers.

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[2]Donald N. Wilber, Iran, Past and Present, 5th Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 18.

HISTORY

Pre-Achaemenid Period

Although our knowledge of the earliest inhabitants of Iran is somewhat fragmentary, we do know that in an area near Behshahr on the Caspian coast, there existed an active flint industry as early as 10,000 B.C.[3] Settlement spread so that by the end of the Neolithic period, villages of considerable size were scattered over the more hospitable areas of the Iranian plateau.[4] At the close of the prehistoric period, civilization in Iran had advanced to the extent that by contemporary standards, sophisticated political, social and cultural patterns had emerged.

During the second millennium B.C., a fresh ethnic element, in the form of successive waves of Aryans, moved into the area of the Iranian plateau. They were followed, in about 900 B.C. by the Iranians, and together these two groups of immigrant peoples almost completely supplanted the earlier residents of the plateau. The Iranians included the groups of the Medes, Persians, Parthians, Bactrians, Soghdians, Sacians and Scythians.[5] The Medes settled in western Iran, and at first, along with the Persians in the south, were dominated by the Assyrians.[6] However, the power of the Iranians grew to such an extent

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[3] Wilber, op. cit., p. 15.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 19.

[6] Ibid.

that late in the sixth century B.C., the Medes under Cyaxares, completely destroyed the Assyrian empire, and extended their influence far into Asia Minor.

Achaemenid Period

In 553 B.C., Cyrus, a member of the Achaemenian clan, revolted and overthrew the Median ruler, Astyages.

> A close union of the Medes and Persians followed, and an army drawn from these resurgant tribal groups was soon engaged in a series of successful campaigns which resulted in the establishment of the first world empire.[7]

Cyrus moved into Asia Minor where, by 546 B.C., he controlled Armenia, Asia Minor and the Greek colonies along the Mediterranean shore. He then expanded the empire east to envelope such regions as Parthia, Chorasmia, Bactria and finally in 539 B.C., Babylon succumbed to his forces.

The son of Cyrus, Cambyses conquered Egypt, and following the death of this ruler, Darius ascended the throne and continued the remarkable conquests initiated by Cyrus. He was unable to completely subdue the Greek states, and although his son, Xerxes I, captured and burnt Athens in 480 B.C., he also was unable to conquer Greece. After Xerxes there followed a succession of less able kings, until finally, under Darius III, the empire came to an end, defeated by the forces of Alexander the Great. Thus ended the history of the Achaemenian empire, which at its greatest extent, was even larger than that of the Assyrians, as it extended from India to the Aegean, and from Eth-

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[7]Wilber, op. cit., p. 19.

iopia to the steppes of Turkestan. It was an empire gained through force of arms, and warfare was ever-present throughout the extent of it its history.

Parthian Period

After the death of Alexander, his vast empire fell under the control of his army commanders. The region of Iran was ruled by the Seleucid monarchy, which was at first centred at Seleucia on the lower Tigris, but the capital was later moved to Antioch in Syria. The Seleucid governor, who ruled over the Iranian region, was overthrown in a revolt led by a Parthian king, Arsaces I, and the Parthians established a new kingdom in Iran and resisted Seleucid attempts to reconquer the area.

The Parthians, also known as the Arsacids, were originally a nomadic Saca tribe, which moved into an area east of the Caspian, and after the successful revolt of Arsaces I, it became their destiny to control Iran for almost five centuries.

Under the leadership of Mithradates I, these excellent warriors and superb horsemen extended their rule to include Bactria, Parsa, Babylonia, Susiana and Media.[8] Later under Mithradates II, they began a long series of wars with Rome, which lasted intermittently for almost three hundred years. There were two main areas of enduring disagreement between the Parthians and the Romans. The first was Armenia, and the second was the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. Time and time again these areas became the sub-

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[8]Wilber, op. cit., p. 28.

ject of bitter dissension and wasteful warfare.[9] The fortunes of war fluctuated between the two powers, with neither side being able to gain a decisive advantage.[10]

After the triumph of Mithradates II, the Parthians came to consider themselves as the political heirs to the Achaemenids. However, their cultural background was very sparse, and they attempted to borrow a culture which contained both Iranian and Hellenistic elements.[11] In the first century A.D., the Parthians swung away from Hellenistic modes of thought, but they were unable to establish a civilization that was truly distinctive in nature. Their political organization and administration could not rival that which had existed under the Achaemenids, and their art and architecture displayed strong Hellenistic and eastern influences rather than originality.

Generally, little is known of the true nature of the Parthian civilization, although it is certain that warfare pervaded their entire history, and that they were capable warriors in battle.

Sassanian Period

Early in the third century A.D., Ardashir, a Sassanid, organized a revolt in the province of Fars, and later, in 224 A.D. his forces were successful in killing the last Parthian ruler. The Sassanids claimed that they, and not the Parthians were the direct descendants

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[9]Malcolm A, R. Colledge, The Parthians (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), p. 36.

[10]Wilber, op. cit., p. 28.

[11]Ibid., p. 29.

of the Achaemenids, and thus claimed the right to the throne.[12]

Like their predecessors, the Sassanids came into direct conflict with Rome, and there began a series of exhausting wars which lasted for over four centuries of Sassanid rule. Once again the forces of east and west were evenly matched, although Shapur I (241-271 A.D.), actually succeeded in capturing the Roman Emperor Valerian in battle.[13] Apart from engaging in war with Rome in the west, the Sassanids fought the Kushans and Ephthalites in the east, and the nomads of the north.

The Sassanids established a civilization, the elements of which were more typically Iranian in character than had been the empire of their predecessors the Parthians.[14] Furthermore, under Khusraw I (531-579 A.D.), administration was sound, irrigation and agriculture was developed, taxes were fixed, and Iran was able to enjoy a period of real prosperity.[15]

Although Khusraw II was at first victorious in battle, the Emperor Heraclius inflicted a crushing defeat on him at Nineveh in 627 A.D., and the Sassanian empire was thrown into anarchy. Finally under Yazdijird III (632-651 A.D.), the tide of Islam, under the Arabs swept across Iran, and the Sassanian empire came to an end.

During the thirteen centuries that elapsed from the rise of

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[12] Roman Ghirshman, Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 289.

[13] Wilber, op. cit., p. 31.

[14] Ghirshman, loc. cit.

[15] Wilber, loc. cit.

Cyrus to the end of the Sassanids, the various Iranian empires, at their greatest extents, covered wide areas of the ancient world. They had a great deal in common in that they were all established by force of arms, they each had to fight almost continuously to maintain their territories, the Achaemenids against the Greek states, and the Parthians and Sassanians against Rome, and all three finally fell when, during periods of internal weakness they were destroyed by stronger, more vigorous forces. Thus, in a manner similar to that of Assyria, the course of Persian history was closely related to warfare, in that wars were fought to establish and maintain empires, and defeat in battle was instrumental in destroying the same empires.

IRANIAN SOCIETY

Throughout the history of ancient Persia, a majority of the people gained their livelihood through agriculture. However, the social status of men who followed this occupation varied according to the particular period of history concerned. Furthermore, the growth of trade during the period under consideration in this study, saw more and more people entering commercial occupations. This led to an expansion of the wealthy middle classes, and a diversification of social groups. During the Achaemenian, Parthian and Sassanian periods, the king was the head of society, and immediately below him were the nobility. Both king and nobles held privileged positions. However, even the status of the nobility changed during different stages of history, a phenomenon which is indicative of the social change that occurred from the beginning of the Achaemenid to the close of the Sassanian period.

Achaemenian Period

At the head of the state was the king, and the Persian monarchy was hereditary. The hereditary principle enjoyed a religious sanction, as is witnessed by inscriptions of Darius, Xerxes and Artaxerxes, all of whom claimed to have been made king by the grace of Ahuramazda.[16] The monarchy was also absolute, in that the king's will expressed in word was law, although his "word" was usually determined in consultation with the Persian nobles, the more prominent members of which usually resided at the court.

Immediately below the king were the nobility and among these the families of the six men who were associated with Darius in the overthrow of Guamata were pre-eminent.[17] This particular group were endowed with great territories, and within them enjoyed princely positions. Other members of the nobility ruled the various administrative units, or satrapies, into which the empire was divided.

Each satrap;

> was in point of fact himself a monarch and was surrounded by a miniature court. Not only did he carry on the civil administration but he was also commander of the satrapal levies. When his office became hereditary, the threat to the central authority could not be ignored. To meet this threat, certain checks were instituted; his secretary, his chief financial official, and the general in charge of the garrison stationed in the citadel of each of the satrapal capitals were under the direct orders of, and reported directly to, the great king in person. Still more effective control was exercised by the "king's eye" (or "king's ear" or "king's messenger") who every year made a careful inspection of each province.[18]

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[16] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. VII, (Cambridge: Cambridge at the University Press, 1926), p. 185.

[17] Ibid., p. 186.

[18] Albert T. E. Olmstead, History of the Persian Empire (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 59.

The great bulk of the Persian population were involved in agricultural and pastoral pursuits. The status of the peasants varied in different areas of the empire. Thus in the province of Fars, where the people were exempt from taxes and dues, even the peasants, being free, were able to own land.[19] In other areas of the empire, where great estates were the important unit of agricultural production, the peasants lived a far less privileged existence. Slaves were also used to help work the large estates. Artisan-serfs, normally situated in the same estates, produced industrial goods, including clothing, furniture and metal vessels.[20] The great masses of rural serfs and peasants also formed a large part of the Persian army.[21]

With the expansion of trade during the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., the middle classes of merchants, bankers and men of associated professions grew rapidly, although the number of people in this class was still small in relation to the vast masses of peasantry.

The Parthians

The Parthian period in Iran saw the development of a type of feudal system, whereby the small estates gradually disappeared, and were replaced by the large domains of the feudal lords.[22] "The peasant and small farmer lost their independence and were increasingly oppressed by the large landed proprietors: officially they remained

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[19] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 184.

[20] Ibid.

[21] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. VII, op. cit., p. 191.

[22] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 285.

free, but their liberty was only relative."[23] The great wealth of the Parthian empire was derived not from agriculture, but from the flourishing caravan trade between Parthia and China and India on the one hand, and Parthia and the Roman Empire on the other.[24] Thus the middle classes, which had already started to expand under the Achaemenians, continued to grow during the Parthian period.

The king was at the head of Parthian society and immediately beneath him were the more distinguished members of the aristocracy. Most of this latter group were feudal lords in charge of a satrapy.[25] To the same category probably belonged the Parthian governors and generals.[26] The middle and lower aristocracy were spread throughout the empire, and served in the army as officers and horsemen.[27] During this period of Iranian history, the provincial nobility became increasingly independent of central authority and a great deal of the power of the empire rested in their hands.

The middle classes were engaged mainly in trade and industry, owned shops in cities, and owned or were leaseholders of parcels of cultivated lands. Finally came many small landowners, the numbers of which gradually diminished; tenants, and a number of slaves.[28]

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[23] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 285.

[24] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XI, (Cambridge: Cambridge at the University Press, 1936), p. 121.

[25] Ibid., p. 114.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., p. 115.

[28] Ibid., p. 121.

In general, apart from the fact that the large landowners enriched themselves while the peasants occupied an increasingly oppressed position, not a great deal is known about the social history of the Parthians.

Sassanian Period

The Sassanians, under Ardashir, adopted in its main lines, the organization and administrative institutions of the Parthian state. While the feudal system did not cease to exist, the new Empire displayed strong centralization, ". . . which substituted a unified State for a loose congeries of vassal kingdoms."[29]

> Sassanian society was marked by the feudal structure which it inherited from the preceding period. Four classes were distinguished: the clergy (asravan), the warriors (arteshtaran), the bureaucrats (dibheran, the secretaries), and the commons (vastryoshan, the peasants, and hutukhshan, the artisans or workmen). The three first classes formed the aristocracy, which was very firmly marked off from the plebians. But this division was in theory rather than fact. The inscription of Shapur I at Hajiabad gives the names of the four classes of the Sassanian high society. The most exalted of these was that of the shahrdars, which, in all probability, comprised the vassal kings of foreign origins and the governors who belonged to the royal family and bore the title of shah. The chiefs of the great feudal houses formed the second class, that of the vaspuhrs. Seven families enjoyed peculiar privileges. The first of these was that of the Sassanids. Certain high offices, military and civil, were hereditary in these houses, but little is known of the true character of these offices. The dignity of hargobadh a Parthian title belonged by right of birth to the family of the Sassanids. The third class, the vuzurgnn, "the Great Ones," comprised the Ministers and other heads of the Administration, and the fourth, the azadhan, "the Free Men," the lesser nobility, which, scattered through all the Empire, acted largely as inferior functionaries in provincial government. The military aristocracy being also a civilian aristocracy, the vaspuhrs were often also members of the class of the vuzurgan.[30]

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[29] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XII, (Cambridge: (Cambridge at the University Press, 1939), p. 110.

[30] Ibid., pp. 114-115.

Detailed knowledge concerning this complicated hierarchy is lacking, although the great landowners were probably more subservient to the king than was the case during the preceding Parthian period. However, the gradation of society was everywhere evident; in clothing, the form of headdress, personal ornaments, and even in the quality of the horses that were ridden.[31]

The aristocracy filled the most important State positions, including the hazarobadh, or Chief Minister, the Minister of Finance, the spahbadh, or General of the Army, and the various high functionaries of the Church.[32]

The continued expansion of trade during the Sassanian period, together with the strict state control over commerce, meant further growth of the middle classes. Many men became officials in charge of inspecting trade, while others were merchants and bankers.

Although agriculture always enjoyed high esteem in Iran, the lot of the peasant under the feudal system was not pleasant.[33] The great estates belonging to the State and nobility continued to be exploited by the old methods, and the thousands of peasants, serfs and artisan-workmen employed on them, did not enjoy easy lives.

The study of society in ancient Iran is complicated by the number of foreigners who lived throughout the country. The presence of Semitic and Greek traders, together with settlements of Jewish

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[31] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XII, op. cit., p. 115.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., p. 117.

people and contact with the Romans, Chinese and Indians meant that Iranian society was exceedingly complex, and accordingly subjected to a wide range of different beliefs.

Throughout the history of ancient Iran, the economic status of peasants varied very little. On the other hand, their legal status if it can be called that, varied from partial freedom under the Achaemenids to almost serfdom under the Parthians. The middle classes continued to expand in both size and importance as commerce and industry grew. The nobility, of whom there were several classes, always occupied positions of importance, although under the Parthians their power reached its zenith. Finally, the king was always at the head of society, although during the Parthian period, his control over the provincial nobles was not as great as during the Achaemenian and Sassanian times.

ECONOMICS

Achaemenid Period

Under the Achaemenids the national economy expanded greatly from previous levels, and the whole economic life of Iran received an unprecedented boost. The new wealth was due largely to the fact that under the Achaemenians, the whole of Western Asia was unified to form one great empire. The entire area was divided into satrapies with their administration under central control. Land and sea routes were created to link all parts of the empire, and an excellent system of tax collection ensured a continuous flow of income into

the national treasury.[34]

Throughout the country, public works were undertaken to increase productive capacity. Subterranean canals (ghanats) which were of vital importance in areas where water was scarce, were constructed. It is also probable that the drainage of marshes took place, since this was practised by the Greeks in the same period.[35] Agriculture expanded throughout the whole empire, as the Persian kings encouraged the spread of plants from one area to another.[36]

> Agriculture was the key industry of the Iranian state, and was considered the natural occupation of a free man. The small estate existed, but was probably relatively unimportant in comparison with the great estates with closed economies. It was above all in Fars, the country of the master people, exempt from taxes and dues, that the peasants, being free, owned land. Wheat and barley, grapes and olives were grown; cattle, sheep, and goats were raised as well as draught animals, the donkey, mule and horse. Bee-keeping was much practised, honey at this period being used for sugar.[37]

Some measure of planning almost certainly existed to encourage the growth of forests. Timber was essential not only for the construction of palaces, but also for building boats, war chariots, weapons and machines of war. Lebanon, Crete and the Island of Cyprus were the main centres of the timber trade. The empire itself was self-sufficient in metals. Thus Cyprus yielded silver, copper and iron, Asia Minor and Palestine, copper and silver; copper and iron from Lebanon and the upper Tigris and Euphrates valleys; the Kerman

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[34]Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 181.

[35]Ibid., p. 182.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid., p. 184.

region yielded gold and silver; Seistan was noted for its tin; the southern Caucasus and the southern shore of the Black Sea for silver and iron; building stone came from the mountains of Elam, and finally, lapis lazuli was mined in Badak-Shan and turquoise and carnelian from the mines of Kharasan.[38]

A very large proportion of the empire's population, both rich and poor, lived on a diet that was essentially bread, fish, wine and small amounts of oil. In some areas, hunting provided meat to supplement the diet. Fishing was very important, and ". . . the fisheries of the Persian Gulf and of the Tigris and Euphrates exported salted, dried and cured fish in jars to a considerable distance."[39]

Side by side with the production of goods by artisan-serfs on the large estates, industry began to develop in the towns. The manufacture of clothing, furniture, gold, silver and bronze vessels, jewellry, cosmetics and clay utensils were among some of the leading industries.

A considerable quantity of these industrial products entered into trade, the volume of which increased enormously during the Achaemenid period. Trade extended from India, Ceylon and China in the East to the Danube and the Rhine in the West.[40]

> The volume of trade in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. surpassed anything previously known in the ancient East, but its main feature was that, instead of the luxury goods of earlier periods, trade was concerned above all with ordinary, everyday products, household articles, and cheap clothing. Thus the

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[38] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 183.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., p. 185.

> development of industry was increasingly directed to the service of all classes of society in the Empire. It is interesting that by the middle of the sixth century B.C. there was a drop in the price of crude ores: this fall in prices may have been partly due to more economic methods of smelting, and in fact also to greater security, and therefore less costly transport.[41]

Internal trade was greatly facilitated by the introduction of coinage,[42] and the growth of genuine private banks. Trade was further assisted by the standardization of weights and measures,[43] and by the vast and relatively efficient transport facilities available.

> The building of roads as well as increased security made for rapidity of transport. At this period a method of road building was developed that consisted in paving the softer parts of the road, and even of making artificial ruts for wheeled transport. Also from the fourth century dates the invention of shoes for beasts of burden in order to protect their hooves on the rough roads; they were made of copper, leather, or horsehair; the true iron horseshoe was not introduced until the second or first century B.C. Shipwrights designed new vessels which could sail sixty to eighty sea-miles in the day; ships of 200 to 500 tons were already being built, and of 100 to 200 tons for normal navigation on the great rivers, such as the Nile, Tigris, or Euphrates. Ports with quays were also constructed for the first time and fixed buoys were available for the mooring of ships; already ship's papers were in use, and sailors were graded in accordance with their skill.[44]

The Achaemenian period also saw the beginning of the organization of a national economy. The establishment of a regular and equitable system of taxation throughout the empire, was one of the principal achievements of Darius, and he placed on the satraps the duty

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[41] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 186.

[42] Olmstead, op. cit., pp. 186-191.

[43] Ibid., pp. 185-186.

[44] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 187.

of raising a specified amount from their respective provinces.[45] Throughout the various satrapies, government agents collected taxes that were levied on estates, flocks, mines, industrial production, shipping, and internal trade. These dues were then paid into the central treasury, and were used to meet the expenses of the palace, the administration, and the army. However, ". . . in the heart of the Empire the estates and temples continued to be the centre of economic life, although they were no longer monopolies and had less power."[46] The state also made efforts to regulate both work and wages. Although labour legislation did not exist, wages of each class of workmen at Persepolis was strictly regulated, as was the price of many goods.[47]

Thus the Achaemenian empire rested on a firm economic basis. Relatively good communities enabled their large empire to be efficiently organized and administered, and this in turn facilitated the collection of taxation and development of trade. These factors combined with an increase in non-temple industry contributed towards making the Achaemenian period a very prosperous one for Iran.

Parthian Period

The Seleucid successors of Alexander the Great collapsed after a period of increasing anarchy. From the middle of the second century

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[45] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. VII, op. cit., p. 198.

[46] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 187.

[47] Ibid., p. 188.

B.C., internal unrest in the form of revolutions and revolts marked the history of Iran. There was an economic crisis and fall in production, while difficulties of exchange and transport were aggravated by the spread of banditry on the roads and piracy at sea.

The Romans, under Augustus did much to re-establish peace in the western areas of the old Achaemenian empire, and the effects of this stabilization was felt in Iran itself as well as in areas further to the east. Rome became the centre of a vast network of trade, stretching from Gaul to central Asia, China and India.

> The wealth of the Arsacids and of the richest vassal-kingdoms and cities of the Parthian Empire depended largely on the flourishing caravan trade between Parthia and China and India on one hand and Parthia and the Roman Empire on the other.[48]

Crafts and industries developed under the Parthians, and the quality of textiles, leatherwork, pottery, arms, and other such products improved considerably. Many of these goods including skins, textiles, worked wood, cattle, birds, rice, drugs, precious stones, bitumen and mineral oil were exported. In return, papyrus, metal objects, glassware, pottery and dyes were imported. Furthermore, internal trade increased in volume and markets were multiplied. Indeed banking was one of the few commercial activities that declined in scope during the Parthian period.[49]

Largely because taxes raised on goods in transit were an important source of revenue, the state made many improvements in means of transport. Roads were maintained in excellent condition, and car-

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[48] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XI, op. cit., p. 121.

[49] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 284.

avan trails across the desert were provided with wells. In major caravan cities such as Palmyra and Dura, houses were specially constructed as meeting places for merchants, and evidence has been found proving the existence of mounted desert police.[50] By establishing a series of strategically placed relay stations, a very efficient postal service was established.

Very little is known regarding the system of taxation that existed under the Parthians.[51] Presumably at first the Seleucid system was adopted.[52] Land taxes were seemingly collected by provincial governors and sent to the central treasury, whereas other types of tax such as customs duties, and taxes on slaves and salt, were the responsibility of royal tax officials.[53] Cities apparently collected their own taxes and sent them in separately.[54] Levies and war booty would have added to the royal revenues. Unfortunately a lack of available evidence does not permit us to clearly define the role of the central government in collecting taxation, and nor does it enable us to even estimate how large were the payments of the various parts of the kingdom to the treasury of the central government.[55]

Under the Parthians, important changes in the sphere of agriculture took place in Iran. The small estate gradually disappeared and

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[50] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 284.

[51] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XI, op. cit., p. 121.

[52] Colledge, op. cit., p. 72.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] The Cambridge Ancient History, loc. cit.

was replaced by the larger domains of feudal lords.[56] Agriculture benefitted from this development in that the wealthy landowner was able to maintain a good standard of farming, and to use scientific techniques which would have been beyond the means of the peasant.[57] Owing to the security afforded by capital investment, the price of land rose and it became impossible for the small peasant to keep possession of his holdings. "Thus the aspect of the country-side was transformed, the greater part being divided between State lands and great estates."[58]

Iran was very stable, with agriculture still being the main source of income. Further income was derived from taxes levied on trade, and the export of industrial products. Significant changes in the nature of land holding occurred, and these in turn led to considerable social changes. For the main, the period of Parthian rule was a prosperous era for Iran.

Sassanian Period

Throughout the Sassanian period, the national economy continued to be based on agriculture rather than on trade.[59] There was also a growth in banking facilities, and in Iran, as well as in Babylonia, a highly developed system of money exchange was employed. Commerce was greatly facilitated by the wide circulation of Sassanian coinage. Bills of exchange appeared and were later introduced into the West. Although

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[56] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 285.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid., p. 341.

considerable money was in circulation in the towns, and foreign trade was conducted almost entirely on a monetary basis, the wages of peasants, soldiers and officials in rural areas were paid in kind.[60] In foreign trade,

> . . . the chief commodities handled were valuable merchandise and luxury goods demanded by the Court and wealthy aristocracy. The levying dues and taxes in kind enabled the Government to build up large stocks of essential goods from which their agents supplied the market; the reserves could also be used in time of famine to alleviate distress.[61]

Trade was subjected to the strictest governmental controls and more stations and water supplies were constructed as the volume of commerce exceeded that which had existed under Parthian rule. Specially allocated officials inspected frontier posts and the sea ports to help control smuggling. Both internal and external trade became more specialized in that merchants restricted their dealings to a less diversified range of products.

> Production improved and expanded, particularly in the silk and glass industries, and this also was marked by a greater degree of specialization. As the result of its monopolies the State became a producer and ran its own workshops. It also intervened in certain private industries, notably those that directly concerned the Court, army and administration; it supervised the prices of raw materials, and the wages and organization of the workers. New tendencies thus arose, which finally crystallized the medieval guilds.[62]

Although the national economy as a whole appeared to prosper, the lot of the peasant deteriorated. As the great landed proprietors became increasingly powerful, the peasants were forced to become the

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[60] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 342.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., p. 343.

property of the state, a great noble or a temple. The great estates developed into closed enterprises, and most of the land was on lease and worked by the peasants who produced everything required by the lord. "Wages and rents were paid in kind, and the circulation of money in the rural areas fell very low."[63]

> The fiscal system of the State was without mercy. Reviving Hellenistic tradition, it burdened the land and the individual with exactions that were beyond human capacity and extorted payment by force. Indirect taxes levied by customs, octrois, and tolls further increased the pressure on the people. All those who were not members of the privileged class were obliged to render all kinds of service. They had to build the royal palaces, furnish materials and skilled labour, maintain the posting stations, provide quarters for the army, and pasture the royal herds. The peasant had to provide his horses for the post, the caravan leader his pack animals, the waggoner his cart, and he boat-man his boat. The State bought produce at prices lower than those ruling in the market, and in spite of royal measures to stamp it out, official corruption was rife.[64]

Thus through trade, industry and agriculture the Iranian economy during the Sassanian period was very prosperous. However, the administration and the army both required enormous sums of money, most of which was raised from the peasantry, and consequently the court and nobility became more and more dependent on what they were given by their masters. During Sassanian rule, Iran evolved a form of feudalism, which subordinated individual liberty to the will of the state for almost a thousand years.[65]

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[63] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 344.

[64] Ibid., p. 345.

[65] Ibid.

RELIGION

At the time of their entry into the Iranian plateau, the Persian religion was a simple Aryan nature worship of daevas, or true gods. At the head of the pantheon stood the sky, who was usually known as the "Lord," Ahura, or the "Wise," Mazdah. "In time these manifestations of the supreme power were united as Ahura-Mazdah, the 'Wise Lord'."[66] Mithra was known collectively as the god of open air, justice, and warfare, and was second in importance only to Ahura-Mazdah.[67] Other gods of the nature-worshipping Aryans included Verethraghna, the god of victory, wind and manhood; Tishtrya, lord and overseer of all the stars; Anahita, the goddess of water and purity; Mah, the moon goddess; and Atar, the fire, which carried the sacrifices to the gods. Although there were numerous others, the above-mentioned were the main dieties of the Iranian pantheon.

Shortly before the Achaemenid period, the original Mazdian religion was reformed by the prophet Zoroaster, and this modified religion eventually spread throughout the Empire.[68] Later, under the Parthians, the religion of Zoroaster was given a position of lesser importance as Anahita seems to have been the most important god. Finally under the Sassanians, south-west Iran was a centre of the cult of Anahita, while in the north-east Zoroastrian ideas were pre-

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[66] Olmstead, op. cit., p. 161.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

dominant.[69] Thus, although it was modified during different periods, the original nature worship of the Iranians remained with them to the end of the Sassanian period. In the following section, the manner in which the religion did change during the different periods of Iranian history will be discussed in more detail.

Achaemenian Period

The Achaemenian period saw the rise of a religion which aimed at replacing the pagan gods personifying natural forces and human passions with a universal system based on the never ending conflict between good and evil.[70] This was the faith preached by Zoroaster, who was probably born in Rhages in Media in 628 B.C.[71] Persecuted in his homeland, he was forced to flee to Chorasmia, where he finally found a patron in King Vishtaspa.[72]

Zoroaster expounded the idea that ". . . the world was ruled by two principles, Good and Evil--the first being a kind of hypostasis of Ahura-Mazda, the second a malevolent spirit, Ahriman."[73] Mankind was divided into good men and the evil-doers and atheists. The former followed Ahura-Mazdah, the latter two Ahriman. Each individual was judged after death, with the good going to paradise, and the wicked

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[69]Olmstead, op. cit., p. 161.

[70]Wilber, op. cit., p. 23.

[71]R. C. Zaehner, The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961), p. 33.

[72]Ibid.

[73]Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 161.

to suffer long punishment.

> The cult was ordered according to strict rules. Blood sacrifices were forbidden, since the beast which fed and worked for man ought to be venerated. The intoxicating drink, haoma, was also banned. Finally the dead could neither be interred, burnt, nor immersed, for fear of defiling the three sacred elements, namely earth, fire, and water. Bodies had to be exposed on the mountains or on towers specially built for this purpose. The bare bones were then placed in ossuaries and deposited in tombs either built or cut in the rock.[74]

Under Darius, Zoroastrianism was accepted as being the official state religion. However in his inscriptions, Darius showed that he was unfamiliar with the more abstruse aspects of Zoroaster's teachings.[75] For example, while he agreed with Zoroaster in recognizing Ahura-Mazdah as the supreme Lord, he did not deny the existence of other gods.[76] Further, he did nothing to destroy any other cults. In fact he restored the places of worship that Gaumata, the Magian, had destroyed, ". . . and in this he shows himself to be totally lacking in the prophetic intolerance of Zoroaster."[77] Probably, as his empire was only partly Iranian, Darius was not prepared to interfere with traditional religious beliefs of other peoples.

Although Xerxes adhered to Zoroastrianism, he was spiritually further removed from the Prophet than his father, as he seems to have followed the form of the Prophet's religion as interpreted to him by

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[74] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 161.

[75] Zaehner, op. cit., p. 157.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid., p. 158.

the Magi.[78] Later kings appear to have moved even further away from Zoroaster's original religion. Thus Artaxerxes II and III both prayed not only to Ahura-Mazdah, but to Mithra and Anahita as well. The probable reasons for this change are three-fold. First, there was the pressure of the still-surviving pre-Zoroastrian religion.[79] Secondly, the influence of the religions of peoples incorporated into the empire must have had some considerable impact on the religious beliefs of the Persians.[80] Finally, the Magi, who enjoyed a monopoly of religious affairs throughout the entire western half of the Achaemenian Empire, were primarily responsible for the transformation of Zoroastrianism from the Prophet's original message to something quite different.[81]

The Magi, according to Herodotus, were one of six Median tribes, although some scholars prefer to see them as a caste.[82] Regardless of this they were ". . . entrusted with the supervision of the national religion, whatever form it might take and in whatever part of the Empire it might be practised."[83] How they attained to this privileged position remains quite obscure, but there seems to be no doubt that their functions passed from father to son right up to the Muslim conquest and after. They made themselves indispensable

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[78] Zaehner, op. cit., p. 161.

[79] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. IV, op. cit., p. 210.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Zaehner, loc. cit.

[82] Ibid., p. 162.

[83] Ibid., p. 163.

at any form of religious ceremony, whether Zoroastrian or otherwise. They did not represent any kind of orthodoxy in religion, for they were sometimes found officiating at sacrifices, and on other occasions they merely stood and watched as others sacrificed.[84] They were probably responsible for introducing three new elements into Zoroastrianism, these being the exposure of the dead to be devoured by vultures and dogs, the practice of incestuous marriages, and the extension of the dualist view of the world to material things and particularly the animal kingdom.[85] Thus the Magi were very important figures in the religious life of the Iranians, and after the death of Zoroaster, were responsible for transforming his religion into a unique set of beliefs which became accepted throughout Western Iran and other areas.

It is doubtful whether any recognizable form of Zoroastrianism would have been accepted by the bulk of the people of Western Iran. Furthermore, only a portion of the Magi would have adhered to the new cult until later in the Achaemenian period.[86] Even after Xerxes had proscribed the worship of the daevas, the people were permitted the widest latitude of cult, and were no doubt free to carry on traditional forms of worship, so long as they did not invoke the daevas by name.[87] It would thus appear that Zoroaster's greatest

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[84] Zaehner, op. cit., p. 163.

[85] Ibid., p. 165.

[86] Ibid., p. 167.

[87] Ibid.

influence was with the priests, royalty and nobility.[88] After the fall of the Achaemenian Empire, Zoroastrianism was kept alive by the Magi, who restored it during the Sassanian period.

Religious rituals were an important part of the day during military campaigns. Thus Herodotus tells us that Xerxes, while reviewing his troops on a hill near Abydos, had incense burnt, and later, at dawn, he ". . . poured libations from a golden cup, prayed with his face toward the rising sun, and cast into the sea the cup, a bowl and a sword."[89] During the same campaign the Magi, who accompanied the king, sacrificed white horses to a stream ". . . for good omen,"[90] while later, nine children were sacrificed to the underworld gods.[91]

As a religion of activism, certain parts of the Iranian religion made a strong appeal to the soldiers whom the Achaemenian kings led to found the Persian empire.[92] By them its sway was extended somewhat to different parts of the empire. Certain texts of the religion were of such a nature that they could have inspired men in battle.

> Victory making, army-governing, endowed with a thousand senses; power-wielding, power-possessing, and all knowing; who sets the battle a going, who stands against armies in battles, who, standing against armies in battle, breaks asunder the lines arrayed. The wings of the columns gone to battle shake, and he throws terror upon the centre of the havocking host. He can

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[88] Thomas Woody, Life and Education in Early Societies (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 179.

[89] Olmstead, op. cit., p. 250.

[90] Ibid., p. 251.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Woody, loc. cit.

> bring and dows bring down upon them distress and fear; he throws down the heads of those who lie unto Mithra, he takes off the heads of those who lie unto Mithra.[93]

There is considerable evidence to support the idea that sacrificial omens, celestial signs, flights of birds and ominous words formed the basis of many Iranian actions. For example, Cyrus, when he knew death was near, returned to Persepolis, where he sacrificed victims in a final ceremony to "Zeus," the sun, and the other gods, upon the acropolis.[94]

Throughout the Achaemenian period, festivals were an important part of the religious year. In particular, the New Year Festival at Persepolis was a spectacular event. Representative peoples from all parts of the empire came to present gifts to the king, then remained for religious ceremonies, banquets and music.

By the end of the Achaemenian period, many private religious sects had formed. Mithra and Anahita were both very popular, while Zoroastrianism was merely one of the private sects. As well as these sects, there existed all the subtle attractions of Greek religion, supported by magnificent temples and a spectacular ritual.[95]

The Achaemenian period was thus a time of religious reform, and at the same time, one of confusion. The main feature of the period was the growth of Zoroastrianism, and its attempt to make the people leave the worship of the more traditional gods. Despite these

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[93] Woody, op. cit., p. 179.

[94] Olmstead, op. cit., p. 478.

[95] Ibid., p. 477.

efforts, the new religion did not find widespread support and in the face of traditional gods and "attractive" Greek religious beliefs, Zoroastrianism in most areas of Iran became but one of many religious sects, and was kept alive only through the efforts of the Magi.

The Parthians.

The Parthian dynasty, which originated in the peripheral regions of Iran, must have first worshipped primitive forces such as the sun and moon.[96] Gradually the Parthians came to adopt the religious beliefs that were practised in Iran. By the time that they were the rulers of Persia, the Parthians worshipped the triad of Ahura-Mazdah, Mithra and Anahita. "Of these three divinities, the cult of Anahita seems to have occupied the most important position from the time of Artaxerxes II, and under the Parthians it became preponderant."[97] Indeed under the Parthians the popularity of Anahita spread throughout much of the empire, including Lydia, Cappadocia and Armenia.[98]

The worship of Zoroastrianism was presumably continued, mainly under the auspices of the Magi.[99] The chief centre of Zoroastrian worship was probably at Shiz, which apparently sheltered a very old community of Magi, who seem to have adopted some of the leading ideas of Zoroastrianism, while at the same time retaining their old traditions and practices, such as the exposure of the dead and incestuous

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[96]Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 268.

[97]Ibid., p. 269.

[98]Ibid., p. 270.

[99]Colledge, op. cit., p. 101.

marriage.[100] Then, during the first century A.D., a form of Zoroastrianism seems to have become more popular. Wilber[101] states that Mazdaism actually became the official religion. However Ghirshman[102] is of the opinion that this increase in popularity was restricted to certain areas of the empire. Colledge seems to favour the opinion held by Ghirshman when he states that ". . . Zoroastrianism was in all probability developing steadily towards its later Sassanian form throughout the Seleucid and Parthian periods, contributing to, and absorbing many elements from, Iranian religion."[103]

One feature of Parthian religious life was outstanding, and that was their remarkable tolerance of foreign religions. Numerous figurines, found mainly in western Iran and made in Greek and Oriental styles, represent a wide variety of deities.[104] Babylonian religion and ritual survived not only in its homeland, but also over a large region of western Parthia and Roman Syria.[105] In particular, men came from afar to study Babylonian astrology. Over western Parthia as a whole, an entire galaxy of Semitic divinities and beliefs prevailed. There existed primitive cults of waters, rivers, lakes and the sea; of trees and even of stones. These were regarded as objects

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[100] Zaehner, op. cit., pp. 162-165.

[101] Wilber, lp. cit., p. 29.

[102] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 268.

[103] Colledge, op. cit., p. 101.

[104] Ibid., p. 104.

[105] Ibid.

into which the deity incorporated himself.[106] Then there were Aramaic, Arabic, Phoenician and other divinities who produced fertility, good crops and rainfall.[107] Greek religion also existed, but was centred mainly around Hellenic communities.[108] Christianity particularly during the second century A.D., also spread throughout the western part of the empire.[109] Thus the main religious developments during the Parthian age included the tolerance shown to other faiths, the virtual multiplicity of sects and divinities worshipped, the modification of Zoroastrianism under the Magi, and the important worship of Ahura-Mazdah, Mithra and Anahita. Into such an apparently confused religious scene came the Sassanians, who managed to form a much more orderly set of beliefs.

The Sassanians

When the Sassanian dynasty came to power, its native province of Fars, was a centre of the cult of Anahita and Ahura-Mazdah.[110] The worship fo Anahita became prevalent in the north east.[111] Little or nothing is known of the relations between these two areas, although ". . . that of the north east may well have had a wider influence than

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[106] Colledge, op. cit., p. 104.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Wilber, op. cit., p. 29.

[110] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 314.

[111] Ibid., p. 315.

that of the south west, but the latter was under the protection of the early princes of the family that had for generations been associated with its cult."[112] By the time of the accession of Shapur II, an official church, resting on Mazdean doctrine was created. This organization was the result of a slow evolution, and the resultant church ". . . was a very distinctive element in the civilization of the Sassanian period."[113]

Zoroastrianism was not the official state religion for the whole of the Sassanian period. Indeed under Shapur I, other religions were tolerated to a remarkable extent. "It is a well-attested fact that he showed goodwill towards the great heretic Mani, whose teaching was anathema to the Mazdean clergy, and Mani dedicated to the king one of his chief works, the Shahpuhraghan."[114] Although some evidence seems to favour the opinion that early in his reign Shapur I attempted to stamp out Christianity, it is almost certain that later he ordered men of all religions to be left undisturbed.[115]

Shortly after the death of Shapur I, Mani was executed, and his followers fled abroad. From this time on there appeared to be a revival of nationalism, and intense opposition to the international world represented by Rome and Christianity.[116] Zoroastrianism, which

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[112] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 315.

[113] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XII, op. cit., p. 111.

[114] Ibid., p. 112.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 318.

had been preserved by the Magi, was given the status of an official cult, and was used to support the state in its struggle with Rome.[117] In some respects, Zoroastrianism under the Sassanids was closer to the actual beliefs of the Prophet than was the case during the Achaemenian period. Mithra and Anahita, who during the First Persian Empire, had risen to positions of near equality to Ahura-Mazdah, became largely irrelevant figures. As these gods receded into the background:

> . . . the dualism between Creator and Destroyer, the Wise Lord and the Destructive Spirit, Ohrmazd and Ahriman as they came to be called, became ever more sharply emphasized, and this was in the spirit of the Prophet himself, not of his epigones who so radically altered his religion during the Achaemenian period.[118]

Sassanid Mazdaism also included features which departed from the original spirit of Zoroastrianism. The most important of these changes was the significance given to fire-worship. There were house-fires, village-fires and provincial fires, the most sacred being the Farrbagh or Priests' fire, the Gushnasp or Warriors' fire, and the Burzen Mihr or Farmers' fire.[119] Fire temples were constructed, and became very important places of worship.

However, the main feature of Sassanid religion remained the revival of Zoroastrianism and its eventual adoption as the national religion. This religion was used to muster the spiritual forces of Iran at its disposal for the defence of the Orient against the West. This led to the persecution of followers of other religions, although this, and possibly the adoption of Zoroastrianism as the state relig-

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[117] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 318.

[118] Zaehner, op. cit., p. 168.

[119] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XI, op. cit., p. 119.

ion, was the result of political forces more than religious intolerance.[120]

EDUCATION

Our knowledge of education among the ancient Iranians is unfortunatley lacking detail. As there was insufficient information available to justify a separate discussion on each of Achaemenian, Parthian and Sassanian education, this section will consist of an overall discussion of education amongst the ancient Iranians, although where possible, differences between the three periods under consideration will be discussed as fully as possible.

Formal education in ancient Iran was limited almost exclusively to male members of the wealthy and upper classes. "The place of women was wholly domestic, the care of their children, to the age of five at least their greatest concern."[121] The lower classes received only an informal type of training, usually in the form of an apprenticeship.

Boys of the upper and wealthy classes of society were more fortunate. Up to the age of five, according to Herodotus[122] and Strabo[123]

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[120] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XI, op. cit., p. 119.

[121] Woody, op. cit., p. 181.

[122] Herodotus, The Persian Wars, Trans. George Rawlinson, (New York: Random House, 1942), I, 136.

[123] Strabo, Geography, Trans. H. L. Jones, (Loeb Classical Library, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1966), XV. iii, 18.

or of seven, according to Plato,[124] speaking of princes, boys were placed under the care of their mothers, or her assistants, in the case of the wealthy.[125] After this age, they began to receive a more systematic training under the guidance of "wise men."

Woody stated that during the Achaemenid period, schools, in the usual sense of the word, did not exist.[126] Whether there is sufficient evidence available to justify this claim may be questionable. Certainly during the Parthian period, Greek schools were situated in parts of the empire, and were attended by Iranian youth.

Education among the upper classes seems to have been based more on moral and physical aspects than on mental.[127] Thus Xenophon[128] stated that boys of the foremost Persian families were taught to ride, shoot with the bow, to eat simply, and to hunt. From other Greek writers, we learn that instruction was given in ". . . history and religion, attendance at judicial proceeding (and) familiarity with the king's methods of awarding or withholding favours."[129]

Darius himself, in his inscriptions, clearly stated his interest in the law, and also made mention of his physical training.

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[124] Plato. Trans. W. R. M. Lamb, (Loeb Classical Library, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1927), Vol. 8, First Alcibiades, IV, 541.

[125] Woody, op. cit., p. 181.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Xenophon, Anabasis, Trans. C. L. Brownson, (Loeb Classical Library, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1932), I. ix, 3.

[129] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. IV, op. cit., p. 191.

> Trained am I both with hands and feet. As a horseman I am a good horseman. As a bowman I am a good bowman both afoot and on horseback. And the skills which Ahuramazda has bestowed upon me, and I have had strength to use them, by the favor of Ahuramazda what has been done by me I have done with those skills which Ahuramazda has bestowed upon me.[130]

Plato[131] described the education of Cyrus, which began at the age of seven with training in riding and the chase. At fourteen he was assigned four royal pedagogues, one to teach him religion and matters of royalty, one to speak the truth all his life, another to help him obtain self-mastery, and the last one to train him to be fearless. One can well imagine that a similar education would have been given to the nobility of the court and of the satrapies.

The wealthy merchant families of ancient Iran must have received some type of formal written education in order to perform their business. Precisely how they obtained this education is not known. During the Parthian period, such youths could have attended schools that were probably run by Greeks.[132] Other possibilities would have included training under the guidance of private tutors, or a less formal type of apprenticeship. The necessity for more men with a knowledge of writing and figures would have increased with the growth of banking.

The Greeks of the Iranian empires maintained a high level of learning, and they certainly influenced the native peoples.[133] Prob-

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[130] Olmstead, op. cit., p. 125.

[131] Plato, op. cit., 120E, 121C and 121E.

[132] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XI, op. cit., p. 126.

[133] Ibid.

ably the most outstanding example was Mani, who through his teachings, was influential during the early years of Sassanian rule. It is certain that he received a good training in Greek philosophy.[134]

Babylonia was another important centre of learning throughout the period of the Iranian empires. This was particularly the case with astrology, astronomy and mathematics. The Iranians were influenced by this learning. For example, some of the crown princes, including Cambyses, ruled over Babylonia, and Darius, when he was king, actively encouraged Babylonian scholarship.[135] Many of his scribes were Babylonians, and he also obtained Babylonian assistance in establishing his law code and in making his calendar more exact.[136]

The Magi were one group who preserved knowledge that pertained to the Iranian culture. Ultimately however, their knowledge of astrology, laws and customs, philosophy, and medicine was closely allied to the primitive religious beliefs of the early Iranians.[137] Slowly the Magi reduced their knowledge to written form, and thereafter Magian education required the mastery of their sacred books, a part of which are now known as the Zend-Avesta.[138] The priests were the formal teachers, and during the Sassanian period, the nobles learned to read and write under them. The wealthier merchants and townsmen were also

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[134] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XI, op. cit., p. 126.

[135] Olmstead, op. cit., p. 199.

[136] Ibid., p. 200.

[137] Woody, op. cit., p. 181.

[138] Ibid.

probably taught these same skills.[139]

The lower classes of society received an informal type of education, usually in the form of an apprenticeship within the family, since boys generally pursued the occupations of their fathers.[140] As the vast majority of people lived on the land, the youth would have learned the various skills of farming, while the sons of tradesmen would have been trained in their father's particular skilled craft.

All classes of society participated in some type of physical training. Such training was encouraged by the Iranian kings, who undoubtably thought that physical prowess would make the men more capable soldiers. Generally, military training was both long and intensive, and is discussed under the section of this chapter dealing with warfare. Part of the Iranian ideal was the welfare of the soul and body:[141]

> Zoroaster prayed for victorious thinking, speaking, and acting, and Mazda gave him "fountains of manliness," strength of arms, keen sight, health, and sturdiness of the entire body. His pious followers likewise prayed first for heaven--the soul's welfare--and next for health and physical strength.[142]

Thus the Persian interest in physical training was motivated partly through religious beliefs, and partly because of the necessity for military training.

Iranian education was apparently more concerned with moral and

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[139] Woody, op. cit., p. 182.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Ibid.

[142] F. M. Muller (Ed.), The Sacred Books of the East, Vol. III, Part II, James Darmesteter (Trans.), (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1898), p. 239.

and physical training than with intellectual development. This notion is supported by the fact that apart from religion, Iran contributed little to the culture of the world. Her art and architecture were largely borrowed from Assyria and Mesopotamia, and Iranian literature was slow in developing.[143] Most of the intellectual life of the empire was centred around the Greek settlements and in Mesopotamia, although the Magi encouraged learning that was closely related to the Iranian civilization. The Persians did not develop their own system of formal schools, but rather tended to use the educational facilities that they found already established in subject territories. It was in the field of physical training, particularly among the privileged classes of society where the Iranians developed a very successful system. Indeed it was so successful in producing excellent soldiers, that the Iranians were able to establish and maintain three large empires, which together lasted for over one thousand years.

WARFARE

The history of Persia, from the time that the Iranians entered the Iranian plateau, to the fall of the Sassanian dynasty, was marked by a high frequency of warfare. After defeating the Medes and extending that empire, the Achaemenians were defeated by Alexander the Great. Then from the middle of the first century B.C. until the Arab conquest of the Sassanians, the Middle East was divided into two great warring empires, first the Parthian and the Roman, and then the Sassanian and Byzantine. Both the Parthians and Sassanians, on numer-

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[143] Woody, op. cit., p. 180.

ous occasions, defeated Roman armies, and indeed the military prowess of the Iranians was known and respected throughout the ancient world.

Under the Achaemenian kings, the core of the Persian army was formed by the Persians themselves.[144] At the head of the army was the famous bodyguard, the Immortals, ". . . who received their name because their number was never permitted to fall below ten thousand, a substitute always being ready when one fell sick or was killed."[145] The Immortals included detachments of Elamites and Medes as well as Persians.[146] The dress of the Ten Thousand was elaborate and expensive, although the exact dress varied according to their ancestry.[147] The Elamite divisions of the Immortals were armed with both spear and bow, while the Medes and Persians carried either one or both weapons.[148] Within the Ten Thousand were a special contingent of One Thousand, who were distinguished from the others by a gold rather than a silver pomegranate set on the bottom of their spears.[149]

The Immortals disappeared with the collapse of the Achaemenian Empire, although during the Parthian period the king had his own special troops, who formed the nucleus of the army.[150] In addition the

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[144] Olmstead, op. cit., p. 238.

[145] Ibid.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid., p. 239.

[148] Ibid.

[149] Ibid.

[150] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XI, op. cit., p. 119.

king had his own force of bodyguards, who were mainly foreigners.[151] The Sassanian kings would have undoubtably had a similar personal bodyguard, although evidence to support the existence of an elite infantry core is lacking.

During the Achaemenian period, the cavalry was ranked next to the Ten Thousand Immortals. During the campaigns of Xerxes, the number of cavalry was in the vicinity of 12,000.[152] Originally the Iranian cavalry came from pastoral nomads, including the Dahai, Mardians and Sagartians,[153] although later in the Achaemenian period the sons of lesser nobility and other privileged classes constituted the most important section of the cavalry. The above-mentioned groups furnished cavalry divisions throughout the Achaemenian period. The Persian, Mede and Cissian horsemen were protected by iron scaled armour and trousers, and sometimes a helmet of hammered bronze and iron.[154] They were armed with a long bow, a short spear and sword, and occasionally carried a shield. The Sagartian nomads carried only daggers and plaited leather lassos.[155]

Under the Parthians the cavalry divisions became the most important section of the army. The cavalry became divided into two principal types: the heavily armed clibanarii and cataphractii, and the lighter sagittarii. The lighter divisions were recruited mainly from

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[151] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XI, op. cit., p. 119.

[152] Olmstead, op. cit., p. 247.

[153] Andrew R. Burn, Persia and the Greeks; the Defence of the West (London: E. Arnold, 1962), p. 40.

[154] Olmstead, op. cit., p. 246.

[155] Ibid.

the lesser nobility of smaller landowners, and were armed with bows, spears and swords, although they also used the lasso.[156] The heavy armed cavalry consisted mainly of the more important nobility, and were armour-plated from head to foot.[157] Even their great horses, specially bred, were iron-mail.[158] This division of the cavalry were armed with bows and huge lances.[159]

Cavalry occupied ths same position of importance in the armies of the Sassanian Empire. The heavy armed cavalry were furnished by the Iranian nobility, and, as under the Parthians, the light cavalry of archers was formed by the petty nobility. Of great importance:

> . . . were the auxiliary formations of the different vassal peoples on the borders of the Empire who, since the time of the first Achaemenians, had furnished a cavalry that was famous for its fighting qualities. Under the Sassanians this included men of Seistan, Albans, Kushans, and Chionit-Ephthalites. The Armenian cavalry was highly esteemed and occupied a key position in the Sassanian army.[160]

Some of the Achaemenian kings made use of elephants in battle. For example, Darius III, during his campaigns against Alexander the Great, used elephants in an attempt to terrorize his antagonists.[161] However, Alexander's well disciplined troops did not panic, although the armies of several other enemies had been routed with the help of these gigantic

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[156] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XI, op. cit., p. 119.

[157] Colledge, op. cit., p. 65.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 313.

[161] Olmstead, op. cit., p. 516.

beasts. Ghirshman[162] stated that the Parthians never used elephants, although the Sassanians did, directly behind the initial wave of shock troops.

Chariots were also used by the Iranians. In Xerxes' army, Indian nobles used chariots drawn by horses or wild asses.[163] Chariots were also used by the Libyans in the same army.[164] Later, in the army of Darius III, a considerable number of chariots were used, although by this time they had scythed wheels.[165] From available evidence, it appeared that the Parthians and Sassanians made little if any use of chariots, instead preferring to rely on the highly skilled cavalry divisions.

The men who formed the infantry divisions of the various Iranian armies were drawn from all corners of the empire. During the Achaemenian period, the Persians ranked as the most important section of the native infantry. They wore loose felt caps, tiaras, tunics over iron-scaled armour, and trousers.[166] They carried a wicker shield and were armed with long bows, short spears and a short sword.[167] These troops were joined by contingents from the satrapies, each under its own satrap. Included were Greeks, Medes, Indians, Elamites, Bactrians and

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[162] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 313.

[163] Olmstead, op. cit., p. 246.

[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid., p. 515.

[166] Ibid., p. 239.

[167] Ibid.

Babylonians, to mention but a few. The Greeks were generally acknowledged as being the most competent soldiers of the whole Iranian army. Most of the above-mentioned groups wore similar clothing and carried the same weapons as did the Iranians. On the other hand, other groups were not so adequately equipped. For instance the Caspians wore skin coats and carried scimitars and cane bows, while the Pactyans were clad in skins and were armed with small bows and daggers.[168]

The great masses of men who together constituted the infantry during the Achaemenid period, were drawn mainly from the peasant population of the empire.[169] The chief Iranian families supplied almost all of the generals and officers of the army.[170] The great bulk of the infantry were not part of the standing army, but rather were conscripted in times of national emergency. The satraps were responsible for securing the requisite levy for the army from the residents in his province, and he then took general command of them in war.[171]

During the Parthian period, the infantry was retained mainly for fighting in hill country and for garrisons.[172] The main bulk of the infantry forces continued to be drawn from the armies of the satraps and of the vassal kings.[173] These men would then join the king's own stand-

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[168] Olmstead, op. cit., p. 242.

[169] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. IV, op. cit., p. 191.

[170] Ibid.

[171] Ibid., p. 198.

[172] Colledge, op. cit., p. 65.

[173] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XI, op. cit., p. 119.

ing army to form the complete infantry section of the Parthian army.

As was the case under the Parthians, the strategic value of the infantry during the Sassanid period was secondary to that of the cavalry. The great bulk of the infantry were again drawn from the provinces of the empire, and for the most part they were used as a rear-guard. Ghirshman went so far as to claim that the infantry was but a mass of poorly armed and equipped peasants who were of little value from the military point of view.[174]

The Persian navy, under the Achaemenians, was quite large, and well equipped and organized. Before his campaigns in Greece, Xerxes sent a naval fighting patrol to reconnoitre the approaches that were to be later used by his main fleet.[175] Burn[176] stated that Phoenician ships were the main part of the Persian fleet, while Olmstead[177] stated that the Egyptians, Anatolians and, later, the Greeks furnished ships for the navy. During the reign of Xerxes, Herodotus[178] estimated that the number of fighting ships, mainly triremes, was 1200. However, more recently, it has been estimated that a total of 730 ships is closer to the actual number that made up Xerxes' fleet when he invaded Greece.[179]

Each trireme had a complement of two hundred sailors, together with thirty marines, the latter being used to guard the boats and also

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[174]Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 313.

[175]Burn, op. cit., p. 385.

[176]Ibid.

[177]Olmstead, op. cit., p. 245.

[178]Herodotus, op. cit., vii, 63.

[179]The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. IV, op. cit., p. 276.

to prevent defection.

Although the Parthians and Sassanians used ships as a means of trade, there is little or no evidence available to suggest that either of these two powers had a navy. Certainly the wars with Rome were fought on land, and neither the Parthians nor the Sassanians attempted to invade Rome by the sea, as the Achaemenians had invaded Greece.

Under Xerxes, the Achaemenian army was divided into six army corps, each corps being comprised of brigades of 10,000. The brigades were further subdivided into regiments of thousands, companies of hundreds and squads of ten.[180] The actual numbers of men involved is still largely a matter of conjecture. Herodotus,[181] states that Xerxes had 1,800,000 fighting men with him when he invaded Greece. The Cambridge Ancient History,[182] points out that if this is the case, then by adding camp followers and the crews of the fleet, a grand total of something over five million men is reached. The same authority reasons that it is probable that Xerxes took but half his army with him and that this would have amounted to some 180,000 combatants, still a considerable fighting force.[183]

With the emphasis on cavalry during the Parthian and Sassanian periods, the size of the armies seems to have decreased somewhat.

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[180] Ibid., p. 239.

[181] Herodotus, op. cit., vii, 60.

[182] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. IV, op. cit., p. 271.

[183] The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. IV, op. cit., p. 273.

Colledge[184] is of the opinion that the Parthian cavalry, with its vast reserve supplies of arrows, was on level ground, capable of surrounding and defeating an army of heavily armed infantry more than three times its size. The actual numbers of men involved in these armies is not known with any certainty. In A.D. 134, when the Alani invaded Parthia, the Parthians fielded an army of 20,000 men.[185] In some of the major battles with Rome, the Sassanians must have had armies well over this number. Thus when Shapur I defeated the Emperor Valerian and 70,000 Roman legionaries, his armies were almost certainly more than 20,000 strong.[186]

Throughout the history of ancient Iran, the development and use of military tactics played an important role in the success of the Iranian armies. The Achaemenian kings were successful in many instances by attacking from both land and sea. For example, when capturing Miletos, the Persians besieged the city both by land and sea, and used many effective siege machines.[187] The army was successful in open battle, wooded terrain and in mountains. During the Parthian period, infantry was retained mainly for fighting in hill country and for garrisons, while the cavalry became the main arm of the army.[188] The heavily armed cavalry usually charged first to create confusion amongst

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[184]Colledge, op. cit., p. 66.

[185]The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XI, op. cit., p. 120.

[186]Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 292.

[187]Burn, op. cit., p. 214.

[188]Colledge, op. cit., p. 65.

enemy ranks. They were followed by the lighter, more mobile horse-archers, whose long range bows could inflict serious losses without trouble.[189] In the advent of an enemy charge, the 'Parthian shot' being a feigned retreat and backward shot over the crupper, was available.[190] Under Suren, the effectiveness of these horse-archers was increased by the availability of an enormous reserve supply of arrows, which were carried by camels. These reserve arrows were an important factor in Suren's defeat of Publius and Crassus at Carrhae in 53 B.C.[191]

The Sassanian tactics in open battle were similar to those used by the Parthians. The heavy cavalry was protected by the lighter horse-archers, while behind these two groups came the elephants and the infantry.[192] Siege warfare, hardly used by the Parthians, received great impetus under the Sassanians, ". . . and in this science they were the equals of the Romans."[193] Although we are only aware of it from indirect sources, there seems to have been a considerable amount of technical literature devoted to military science during the Sassanian period.[194]

There were treatises dealing with the organization of the army in war and peace and instructions on the use of cavalry and care of

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[189] Ibid., p. 66.

[190] Ibid.

[191] Ibid., p. 41.

[192] Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 313.

[193] Ibid.

[194] Ibid., p. 314.

horses, on how to draw the bow and on victualling the troops. There were chapters dealing with tactics, the treatment of the enemy, the choice of time and place for battle.[195]

Taken overall, it appears that during the Sassanian period, Iranian military science was equivalent to that possessed by the Romans.

The Iranians also made use of psychological warfare. Thus when the city of Miletos revolted, Darius crushed the city, killing many of the men inhabitants, and transporting the rest of the population to an area near the Red Sea.[196] Furthermore, it appears as though reports were circulated throughout much of the empire that the entire population of Miletos had been annihilated.[197] Such moves were undoubtably employed to discourage uprisings in other cities.

Another aspect of Iranian warfare became evident after the capture of Babylon in the fifth century B.C. Propagandists for Cyrus produced material which led the people of Babylon to believe that Cyrus was their liberator, and that their former ruler, Nabonidus, was a heretic and a tyrant.[198]

Military training was long and severe, although the nature and duration probably varied according to the social class of each individual. Xenophon[199] says that training was divided into two periods; first, from age five to seventeen, and then an additional ten years of-

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[195] Ibid.

[196] Burn, op. cit., p. 214.

[197] Ibid.

[198] Ibid., p. 58.

[199] Xenophon, Anabasis, op. cit., I, 136.

guard duty, hunting, and continued practice with the bow and javelin which the men had learned as boys. However, Xenophon also states that only those men whose families could maintain them without putting them to work, were able to participate in this type of training. The lower classes of society, who would have formed the rank and file of the army, would have had to have relied on the occasional hunting excursion, perhaps the playing of vigorous games, and the hardy nature of their occupations to keep them in sound physical condition.

The type of training undergone by the higher classes of society was long and vigorous. Strabo[200] states that each day, the soldiers arose before dawn, and were divided into companies of fifty, each under a leader who put them through a long race. "Toughness was developed through watching herds, staying on guard all night, exposure to heat, cold, and rain, and practice in crossing swift streams while keeping their clothes and weapons dry".[201] Strabo[202] stated that the king gave prizes to encourage youth to excel in the exercises of the pentathlon. Horse riding formed a very important part of the training of these young men, most of whom would be in the cavalry division of the army. Polo, and more particularly hunting were both popular, and were undoubtably used as a means of training youths to become good horsemen. Finally, at the end of each day, the boys worked at planting trees, cutting and collecting roots, and making armour, lines and nets.[203]

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[200]Strabo, op. cit., XV. iii, 18-19.

[201]Ibid.

[202]Ibid.

[203]Woody, op. cit., p. 183.

The men who formed the Iranian armies would have become familiar with at least one physical skill which they used to defend themselves and to fight with. From a study of the weapons used in ancient Iranian warfare, it should be possible to obtain a list of associated physical skills that were necessary. The main weapons used included spears, knives, clubs, bows and arrows, slings, lances, maces, axes, lassoes, swords and daggers.[204] The main physical skills therefore would have included thrusting and possibly throwing of spears, knives and daggers, archery, slinging, sword fighting, striking with clubs, axes and maces, throwing lassoes, and also horse-riding and chariot driving. Other activities would have included running, hand to hand combat, swimming and the riding of camels and elephants.

Some of the Iranian soldiers, notably the more privileged members of society who spent a great deal of time in training, would have become very skilled at some of the abovementioned activities. The number of peasants who attained a high level of skill would have been limited, particularly in the Parthian and Sassanian periods, when the army depended so heavily on the cavalry and horse archers. Furthermore, there would have been a changing emphasis on the importance of the skills necessary. In particular, the heavy cavalry armed with lance did not become really prominent until the Sassanian period while spearmen and foot archers were of more significance during the Achaemenian period. The increasing dependence on a highly trained force of armed horsemen during the Parthian and Sassanian periods, and an associated decline in the importance of huge masses of infantry, may have led to a situation

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[204]Woody, op. cit., p. 185.

whereby the peasants of Sassanian times, realizing that they would not be constantly called upon to fight may not have spent as much time learning and developing skills of war as did their counterparts during the Achaemenian period. However, the constant threat of warfare in ancient Iran would have meant that each able-bodied man would probably have become familiar with one or more of the physical activities mentioned above.

CHAPTER V

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE ANCIENT IRANIANS

Introduction

Although the amount of evidence pertaining to recreational activities among the Achaemenians is quite considerable, there is not a correspondingly large amount of information available concerning the Parthians and Sassanians. This disparity is primarily due to the relative influences of the Greek and Roman worlds on the Iranian civilization. The political history of the ancient Achaemenians shows that they had a considerable amount of contact with the Greek world, but on the other hand Parthian and Sassanian contact with the Roman civilization did not lead to a great deal of cultural exchange.

As was the case with the Assyrian civilization, the descriptions of the recreational activities of the ancient Iranians is limited by the amounts of information available. Following the description of each activity, attempts were made to explain the interrelationship, if any, that existed between recreational activities and warfare in ancient Iran.

Archery and Spear Throwing

That the Achaemenians devoted a considerable amount of time developing the skills of archery and spear throwing is clearly evident from a survey of the writings of some of the classical Greek scholars. Xenophon stated that Persian youth as part of their education passed a considerable amount of their time ". . . shooting with the bow and hurling the spear and practicing all the other arts that they learned when

they were boys."[1] He also mentioned that as an important part of this training, the youths continually engaged in contests with each other, and occasionally entered public tournaments where prizes were offered.[2] It appears then, that as boys, the Achaemenians were instructed in the skills of archery and spear throwing and probably practiced these arts by using stationery targets. Later, as teenagers and young men, they continued to develop these skills through informal and public competitions, as well as by participation in the hunt.[3]

It would be a misconception to think that every Achaemenian boy devoted most of his time to the pursuit of such activities. In describing the education of Persian youth, Xenophon was referring only to boys whose parents could afford to support them in this type of situation. The great majority of boys would have been forced to labour in the fields, and consequently would have found relatively little time to practice archery and spear throwing.

There is little evidence to show that the Parthians and Sassanians practiced these two activities, although Strabo, who wrote during the early years of the first century A.D., stated that the Iranians from ages five to twenty four were trained to use the bow and throw the spear.[4] From their many successes in battle, we know that both of these

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[1]Xenophon, Cyropaedia, Trans. Walter Miller, (Loeb Classical Library, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1914), I. ii, 12.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Strabo, Geography, Trans. H. L. Jones, (Loeb Classical Library, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1966), XV. iii,18.

Plate XVIII Darius the Great hunting lions from a chariot.

Plate XIX Achaemenian king hunting lions with bow and arrow.

weapons were used very effectively, and thus it is not unreasonable to assume that the Parthians and Sassanians did participate in archery and spear throwing. In a fashion similar to the Achaemenians, use was probably made of stationary targets, competitions, and hunting to develop these skills. With the increasing importance of cavalry under the Parthians and Sassanians, one would expect that more emphasis would have been placed on the shooting of bows while mounted on horses. This would have been particularly true of the Parthian cavalry, who developed the complex "Parthian shot" (see plate XXVI). The successful execution of this particular shot must have required many hours of devoted practice.

Preparation for war was undoubtably the principle motive that led to Iranian youth participating in archery and spear throwing. Indeed, Xenophon referred to the soldiery arts of archery and javelin throwing.[5] Although tournaments, and more particularly hunting and informal competitions, would have provided a considerable amount of enjoyment for the participants, the main reason for taking part in such events would have been to develop the physical skills mentioned above.

Athletics

Although no reliefs have been found depicting the ancient Iranians participating in athletic events, Xenophon mentioned that the Achaemenians were familiar with athletics. He stated that during the revolt of Cyrus against his brother, King Artaxerxes II, some of the Greek mercenaries in the rebel army ". . . celebrated the Lycaean festival and organized athletic sports. The prizes were gold crowns, and Cyrus himself

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[5]Xenophon, The Persian Expedition, Trans. Rex Warner, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1957), p. 52.

watched the sports."[6] There was no mention as to whether the Persian soldiers participated in the sports. Probably they did not, for the Greeks, although admiring Cyrus, still regarded all non-Greeks as "barbarians," who consequently were not fit to compete against them. Regardless of whether they competed against the Greeks, many of the Persians would have watched the sports, and may have practiced the skills among themselves.

At best, Xenophon's reference would indicate that the Achaemenians were familiar with athletics. However, when describing the education of Parthian boys, Strabo stated that ". . . prizes are offered by the king for victory in running and in the four other contests of the pentathla."[7] The events comprising the pentathla included jumping, discus throwing, running, wrestling, and javelin throwing or boxing. Strabo also stated that each morning, as part of their training, the Persian youth participated in a foot race over a distance of thirty to forty stadia.[8] No evidence was found to show that the Sassanians participated in athletic events. While it is probable that they did know of, and in fact did take part in some of the above-mentioned activities, it is more likely that the popularity of athletic events may have declined along with the decreasing importance of the role of the infantry in warfare. Instead, activities and contests involving mounted men using bows and spears may have become more frequent.

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[6]Xenophon, The Persian Expedition, op. cit., p. 22.

[7]Strabo, op. cit., I. iv, 4.

[8]Ibid.

It is highly probable that many boys and young men held informal athletic contests among themselves. Indeed Xenophon stated that Persian boys frequently engaged in informal competitions among themselves, and that such occasions were a source of great enjoyment for the participants.[9]

From the evidence that was available, it was not possible to fully explain the role played by athletic sports in the ancient Iranian civilization. Certainly, if we are to believe Strabo, Persian youth participated in running, jumping, wrestling, discus and javelin throwing and probably boxing, as an integrel part of their education. That these activities were used to help prepare youth for warfare cannot be doubted, for Strabo stated that immediately after their training the young men served in the army until they reached the age of fifty.[10] Among the less formal contests held between small groups of boys and young men, relaxation and enjoyment would have been important motives.

Banquets

The ruins of Persepolis provided considerable information regarding ing royal banquets during the Achaemenian period. A number of reliefs depicted a group of nobles ascending a long staircase on their way to the royal banquet hall. The guests were elaborately attired, as were the guards and other attendants.[11] Food and drink was supplied in large quantities at these banquets. For example, horses, camels, oxen, asses,

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[9]Xenophon, Cyropaedia, op. cit., I. iv, 4.

[10]Strabo, op. cit., XV. iii, 19.

[11]A. T. Olmstead, History of the Persian Empire (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 183.

deer, ostriches, geese and cocks were slaughtered in large numbers.[12] Musicians, including singers, entertained the guests at many of these banquets.[13]

The Achaemenians held banquets to celebrate important events such as the New Year, and royal birthdays.[14] On the occasion of the New Year's Feast, a long procession of soldiers, courtiers and subject peoples were able to see the king, while more privileged guests were permitted to dine in the royal banquet hall. On the occasion of his birthday, the king presented gifts to his fellow Persians, and entertained up to fifteen thousand guests at a cost of four hundred talents.[15] With the decline of the worship of "pure" Zoroastrianism, annual festivals were held to worship other gods such as Mithra, and on such occasions, banquets were held.[16]

References to the Parthians and Sassanians participating in banquets are less common. Colledge, in reference to the Parthians, mentioned that after Suren's victory over Crassus, the latter's head and hands were cut off and sent to King Orodes II, who at the time was with Artovasdes of Armenia.[17] Both kings were celebrating a political betrothal between their children with banquets and recitations from Greek literat-

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[12] Olmstead, op. cit., p. 183.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., p. 182.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., p. 478.

[17] Malcolm A. R. Colledge, The Parthians (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), p. 42.

ure. Apparently the singing of heroic lays or epics was a popular form of entertainment at banquets held by the upper classes of Parthian society.[18] Indeed, feasting and the recitation of epics was one of the dominant characteristics of the life of the Parthian nobility.[19] Strabo gave a vivid description of Persian banquets:

> Persians dine in an extravagant manner, serving whole animals in great numbers and of various kinds; and their couches, as also their drinking-cups and everything else, are so brilliantly ornamented that they gleam with gold and silver.
>
> They carry on their most important deliberations when drinking wine; and they regard decisions then made as more lasting than those made when they are sober.[20]

Firdausi's frequent references to banquets would lead us to believe that such events were extremely popular in ancient Iran. During his search for his kidnapped horse Rakhsh, Rostam went to Samangan where Tahamtan the king gave a banquet in his honour.

> To the cooks he gave orders to prepare a festive table which was to be set before the warriors, who took their places, as did the musicians, in a manner to ensure that Tahamtan would extinguish any ill-will that he (Rostam) harboured.[21]

On another occasion when Rostam returned to Iran after a victorious military campaign, great festivities were held, and lavish banquets were an integral part of the celebrations.[22] In a more personal vein Firdausi

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[18] Colledge, op. cit., p. 94.

[19] Ibid., p. 175.

[20] Strabo, op. cit., XV. iii, 19.

[21] Reuben Levy (Translator), The Epic of Kings or Shah-Nama, the National Epic of Persia by Ferdowsi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 65.

[22] Ibid., p. 145.

Plate XX — Parthian horseman hunting lions with a spear.

Plate XXI — Sassanian horseman killing lion with a lance.

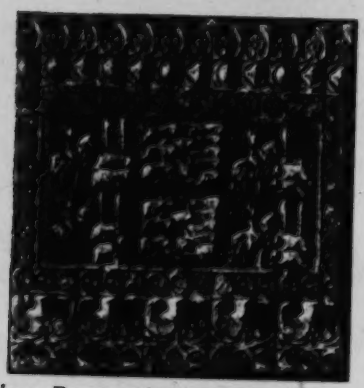

Plate XXII — King Peroz (Sassanian) hunting wild boars in a hunting park.

described a banquet between Bizhan and Manizha, his fiance.

> They washed his feet in musk and rose-water, then hasted to prepare a meal. Soon they set down a tray covered with viands of every kind to which they pressed him ever and anon. Afterwards they seated themselves for music and wine, having cleared the pavilion of all others. Slaves stationed themselves with lute and harp to make melody. The floor had been given the colours of a parrot, or, with gold coins and brocades appeared like a leopard's hide.[23]

Although there is no information pertaining to banquets among the common poople, it is reasonable to assume that on special occasions such as birthdays and weddings, some form of feasting would have taken place. The banquets staged for royalty were grandiose affairs with large quantities of food and drink, together with a variety of entertainment including singing, dancing, music and occasionally jugglers and acrobats (see page 208) for a description of acrobats . On most occasions banquets were held simply to celebrate festive occasions such as birthdays and weddings, and also on the return of soldiers after a successful campaign. The banquets held to celebrate the New Year, while being a source of pleasure for those who were invited, were held primarily for religious reasons. Regardless of the motives that led to banquets being held, it is certain that they were extremely popular in ancient Iran, and a study of them enabled us to obtain considerable insight into the manner in which these people relaxed and enjoyed themselves.

Boxing and Wrestling

From the available evidence, it would appear that wrestling was a relatively common activity in ancient Iran. On the other hand, references to boxing are almost non-existent, and it appears that it was not a

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[23]Levy, op. cit., p. 157.

very popular sport. One reference to boxing was made by Thucydides, who stated that ". . . to this day among some foreign peoples, especially in Asia, when prizes for boxing and wrestling are offered, belts are worn by the combatants."[24] Thucydides, who lived during the fifth century B.C. may have been referring to the Achaemenians. Strabo stated that some Persian boys participated in the events of the pentathla, of which boxing could have been a part.[25] However, apart from these two isolated references, there is little indication that boxing was of any great significance as a recreational activity in Iran.

The works of Firdausi add insight into the role played by wrestling in the lives of the Persians. He has mentioned that wrestling was an activity in which Darius participated before he became king. "When he wrestled with his playmates on the road none had his sturdiness or strength."[26] Even though Firdausi's accounts are based on legend, the only aspect that is likely to be seriously distorted is the extent of Darius's physical prowess. Indeed, wrestling was probably very popular among boys of all social classes.

Wrestling was sometimes significant in battle.[27] When describing the Iranian siege of the city of Bidad, Firdausi stated that ". . . there were lasso-throwers and wrestlers and others also who in

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[24]Thucydides, The History of the Peloponnesian War, Trans. Sir R. W. Livingstone (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), I. vi, 5.

[25]Strabo, op. cit., XV. iii, 18.

[26]Levy, op. cit., p. 223.

[27]Ibid., p. 140.

combat were as stone on anvil."[28] Firdausi then related how the two opposing leaders wrestled with each other before the actual battle.[29] When the armies of the Emperor Valerian met with those of Shapur, each army sent forth their best wrestler, who met and:

> . . . wrestled together in their struggle and their dust dropped onto the stars. Many were the devices by which they attempted to satisfy their rage but neither man could be overcome by the other. At last the entire armies on either side clashed together like mountain against mountain.[30]

According to later legends, the outcome of an entire battle was sometimes decided solely by a wrestling match between representatives from the two forces. For example, Firdausi stated that on one occasion Rostam defeated an opposing leader, Puladvand in such convincing fashion in a wrestling match that the latter's army refused to fight.[31] However, it is dubious whether actual battles were decided entirely by wrestling matches between representatives from each army.

It would appear that while boxing was not a popular activity in ancient Iran, participation in wrestling was relatively common. Boys from all social classes would have wrestled among themselves for sheer enjoyment. While young men would have participated for enjoyment, they would also have used wrestling as a means of preparing themselves for hand-to-hand combat in battle. Some kings, including Darius, undoubtably enhanced their reputations by being competent wrestlers, but in general

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[28] Levy, op. cit., p. 140.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., p. 283.

wrestling in ancient Iran was considered to be a significant means of helping prepare men for warfare.

Competitions and Tournaments

During the Achaemenian period, various public competitions and tournaments were staged.[31] As a part of such contests, Persian youth competed against each other in the skills of archery, throwing the spear, and ". . . all the other arts that they learned when they were boys."[32] During the intensive military training undertaken by members of the more privileged classes of society, each individual was placed into a training division, and during the public competitions prizes were awarded to the training divisions that had ". . . the greatest number of the most expert, the most manly and the best disciplined young men."[33] The instructors of such divisions were praised and honoured by the rest of the citizens.[34]

Further evidence of individual competition was found in Xenophon's accounts of the education of Cyrus.

> The boys liked him, too; for in all the contests in which those of the same age are wont often to engage with one another he did not challenge his mates to those in which he knew he was superior, but he proposed precisely those exercises in which he knew he was not their equal, saying that he would do better than they; and he would at once take the lead, jumping up upon the horses to contend on horseback either in archery or in throwing the spear, although he was not yet a good rider, and when he was beaten he laughed at himself most heart-

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[31] Xenophon, Cyropaedia, op. cit., I. ii, 12.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

ily.[35]

The mention of "all the contests in which those of the same age are wont often to engage with one another," would lead us to believe that informally organized contests were frequently held among boys from the upper classes of Persian society. Although no evidence was found that categorically stated so, groups of boys from the less privileged social classes would almost certainly have participated in similar informal contests.

Some of the Achaemenian kings showed considerable interest in competitions and tournaments. During one campaign, Cyrus stayed for three days at Peltae, in the course of which Xenias the Arcadian celebrated the Lycaean festival and organized athletic sports.[36] The prizes offered were gold crowns, and Cyrus himself watched the sports.[37] While no mention was made of Achaemenian soldiers participating in the events, it does appear that the Persians were interested in the festival, and were certainly familiar with the many athletic events held.

The Parthians held public tournaments for the events of the pentathla.[38] Such occasions were very important as is evidenced by the fact that the king himself offered prizes to the victors.[39] Unfortunately, there was little or no evidence pertaining to public competitions among the Sassanians. However, it is possible that they were held, and it is

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[35]Xenophon, Cyropaedia, op. cit., I. iv, 4.

[36]Xenophon, The Persian Expedition, op. cit., p. 22.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Strabo, op. cit., XV. iii, 18.

[39]Ibid.

also likely that boys from all social groups held informal contests among themselves.

The Iranians probably used the public tournaments as an incentive for the participants to excel in the various physical skills involved. As archery and spear throwing were important events in some of the contests, it seems that the Persians were encouraging their young men to become as proficient as possible in these skills of warfare. While many of the participants would have enjoyed the tournaments, most of them would have been competing for the great honour that was bestowed upon the winners. Enjoyment and preparation for war would have been the main reasons why boys participated in the less formal competitions held among smaller groups of individuals.

Dance

Although there are relatively few references to dance in ancient Iran, Woody is of the opinion that dancing was quite a popular activity.[40] To support this proposition he has stated that certain Persian dances were introduced into Greece.

> A Persian dance, similar to one of the Cossacks, in which the dancer squats and alternately thrusts the legs forward horizontally, was known as oklasma to the Greeks, whose artists depicted it on certain vases about the fourth century B.C.[41]

Among the Achaemenians, Xenophon mentioned that when he was a very old man, Cyrus returned to Persia and ". . . performed the customary sacrifice and led the Persians in their national dance and distributed pres-

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[40]Thomas Woody, Life and Education in Early Societies (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 192.

[41]Ibid.

ents among them all, as had been his custom."[42] The reference to a "national dance" would seem to indicate that at least some form of dancing was familiar to a majority of Persians. Further, since the dance referred to by Xenophon was associated with sacrifices, it was of religious significance, and was not performed primarily for pleasure or entertainment.

Several surviving objects of Parthian and Sassanian art depict dancing scenes. A silver cast cup of Sassanian origins, and dating to around the fourth century A.D., depicted female musicians surrounding a dancer who was holding castenets.[43] A second silver gilt jug from approximately the same period showed four girls dancing among a bower of branches.[44] Yet a further silver bowl from this same period is engraved with a banquet scene, in which one of the figures was a nude dancing girl who was throwing her veil into the air.[45] The figures depicted on the latter two objects described above represented priestesses of the goddess Anahita. From the fourth century on, dancing formed an integral part of the ritual that was involved in the worship of this goddess.[46] When dancing the priestesses usually held various flowers, pomegranates, and

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[42]Xenophon, Cyropaedia, op. cit., 7. i.

[43]Roman Ghirshman, Iran: Parthians and Sassanians, Trans. S. Gilbert and J. Emmons, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962), p. 216.

[44]V. G. Lukonin, Persia II, Trans. James Hogarth, (Geneva: Nagel Publishers, 1967), pl. 183.

[45]Ghirshman, op. cit., p. 217.

[46]Lukonin, op. cit., p. 181.

doves which were symbols of Anahita.[47]

Plate XXXII is a photographic of small bone plaques of Parthian origins, the figures of which depicted acrobats and dancers. Rawlinson has provided further insight into the role played by the dance during the Parthian period. He stated that when the Roman Caracallus came to marry a daughter of Artabanus, a large number of Parthians attended the reception, during which:

> . . . a multitude of the barbarians, crowned with freshly gathered flowers, and clad in garments embroidered with gold and variously dyed, were keeping holiday, and dancing gracefully to the sound of the flute, the pipe, and the drum--an amusement wherein they take great delight after they have indulged freely in wine.[48]

When attending banquets and other festive occasions, the Iranians enjoyed being entertained by dancers and musicians. Although Rawlinson's description makes it clear that the more privileged classes of Iranian society took great pleasure in dancing, it is not known whether the common people danced themselves, or hired out groups of dancers who performed for them. However, there is every reason to believe that they, as well as the upper social classes, enjoyed both watching and participating in dancing.

Apart from the obvious religious significance of some forms of dance, the Iranians both watched and participated in dancing as a means of relaxation and enjoyment. There is no evidence that dancing was related to warfare, although when soldiers returned from campaigns, dancing probably formed one part of the festivities that took place.

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[47]Lukonin, op. cit., p. 181.

[48]G. Rawlinson, The Seven Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World (New York: Continental Press, 1875), p. 351.

Plate XXIII Jousting scene showing the Sassanian king Hormizd II charging.

Plate XXIV Mounted Parthian archer about to fire his bow.

Singing

Among the Achaemenians singing was quite popular. During most meals the king ". . . was entertained by concubines who sang or played the lyre, one solo and the others in chorus."[49] The Parthians were also familiar with singing, as is evidenced by the fact that as part of their education, Parthian boys ". . . rehearse both with song and without song deeds both of the gods and of the noblest men."[50] At banquets held by Parthian aristocrats, ". . . bards would have sung heroic lays."[51] Apparently whole cycles of these epics existed, and they eventually gave rise to Firdausi's Shahnameh, or Book of Kings. There was little evidence to suggest that singing was popular during the Sassanian period, although singers and minstrels were present at banquets,[52] and probably at weddings, birthdays and other festive occasions. When victorious soldiers returned from battle, "great festivities" were held,[53] and on such occasions it was highly probable that singing, as well as dancing and feasting were popular forms of celebration.

There was insufficient evidence to draw any conclusions regarding the popularity of singing among the less privileged classes of Iranian society. Most likely they sang among themselves as a means of relaxation and enjoyment, and on special occasions may have rented profession-

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[49] Olmstead, op. cit., p. 183.

[50] Strabo, op. cit., XV. iii, 18.

[51] Colledge, op. cit., p. 94.

[52] Levy, op. cit., p. 65.

[53] Ibid., p. 145.

al singers.

The amount of information pertaining to singing in ancient Iran seems to indicate that it was quite a popular form of entertainment. On certain occasions upper classes enjoyed being entertained by singers, but nothing is known of the popularity of singing among the common people. The heroic lays describing the feats of Iranian gods and warriors seem to have been very prominent throughout the course of Persian history, but little is known concerning other types of songs.

Music

As was the case with the Assyrians, the ancient Iranians made numerous references to music. Together with dancing and singing, music was a very popular activity at banquets and similar festive occasions. Wind, percussion and stringed instruments were all used, and professional musicians were quite common.[54]

Percussion instruments included drums,[55] kettle drums[56] and castanets,[57] while the wind instruments that were familiar to the Iranians were lyres,[58] single and double flutes,[59] an arghanum[60] (a type of

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[54]Roman Ghirshman, Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 312.

[55]Colledge, op. cit., p. 93.

[56]Ibid., pp. 40 and 66. See also Levy, op. cit., p. 97.

[57]Ghirshman, Iran: Parthians and Sassanians, op. cit., p. 216.

[58]Colledge, op. cit., p. 93.

[59]Ibid.

[60]Ghirshman, loc. cit.

bagpipe with five chambers above it) and trumpets.[61] The known stringed instruments were harps[62] and mandolins.[63]

Apart from being played at banquets and other festive occasions,[64] music was used during some hunts. On one occasion Khosrow went hunting accompanied by some 2,000 musicians,[65] while numerous reliefs depicted other Sassanian kings hunting while musicians played in the background.[66] Trumpets and kettle drums were sometimes loudly played before the beginnings of polo matches,[67] as well as before the start of some battles.[68] Thus before the battle between Crassus and Suren, the Parthian mailed lancers charged ". . . to the roar of kettledrums."[69] It is not known whether the music was used to urge the men on in battle, or merely as a signal to begin the fighting.

One of the major reasons for the playing of music was for the enjoyment of those who listened. On the other hand, the musicians themselves played primarily for economic motives. During the Sassanian per-

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[61] Levy, op. cit., p. 97.

[62] Ibid., p. 157.

[63] Ghirshman, Iran: Parthians and Sassanians, op. cit., p. 216.

[64] Levy, op. cit., pp. 65 and 309.

[65] Ibid., p. 379.

[66] See for example Ghirshman, op. cit., pp. 199 and 194-196.

[67] Levy, op. cit., p. 97.

[68] Ibid., p. 118.

[69] Colledge, op. cit., p. 40.

iod there were numerous professional musicians, some of whom played an important part in court life.[70] Musicians were divided into three grades, according to their skill and the instruments on which they performed.[71] It is apparent then that music was very popular in ancient Iran. Although it was played primarily for the listening pleasure of audiences, it was also used in warfare, and was of economic significance to professional musicians.

Drama and Recitations

Most available information relating to drama in ancient Iran came from the Parthian period. Neither the Achaemenians nor the Sassanians made significant reference to it. Strabo stated that the Persians rehearsed ". . . both with song and without song the deeds both of the gods and of the noblest men."[72] The singing and recitation of these heroic lays was popular throughout the history of ancient Iran, and were particularly common at banquets staged by the more privileged members of Parthian society.[73]

After Suren's victory over the Roman Crassus, the latter's head and hands were cut off and sent to King Orodes II (57 - 38 B.C.) who, together with Artovasdes of Armenia, was ". . . celebrating a political betrothal between their children with banquets and recitations from Greek

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[70]Ghirshman, Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest, op. cit., p. 312.

[71]Ibid.

[72]Strabo, op. cit., XV. iii, 18.

[73]Colledge, op. cit., p. 94.

literature."[74] Colledge has stated that some of the Parthian monarchs favoured Greek culture and had Greek plays performed at court.[75] A Greek theatre was discovered at Nisa, and a performance of Euripides' Bacchae was allegedly arranged by king Artovasdes of Armenia for Orodes II.[76] Throughout the Parthian period in ancient Iran, wherever there were Greek settlers, there existed gymnasia, baths and theatres, literature and oratory, and the overall Greek influence in theatre during this period was quite pronounced.[77] Some Parthian temples had small open-air theatres where people were able to watch religious rites and ceremonies, but it is not known whether these theatres were used for plays or recitals.

There is little direct evidence relating to the nature and popularity of drama during the Sassanian period. However, excavations carried out by Ghirshman at the ancient city of Bishapur, which was built by Shapur I, revealed portraits of actors and theatrical masks as well as of dancing girls.[78] The actors and dancers apparently performed an important role during the spring festival of the New Year, one of the most important Zoroastrian festivals.[79]

It appears that watching plays and listening to recitations

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[74]Colledge, op. cit., p. 42.

[75]Ibid., p. 94.

[76]Ibid.

[77]Ibid., p. 95.

[78]Lukonin, op. cit., p. 158.

[79]Ibid.

Plate XXV Sassanian royal hunt.

Plate XXVI A Sassanian king executing a "Parthian shot".

Plate XXVII King Chosroes II hunting from horseback.

was quite a popular form of entertainment among the upper classes of Iranian society. As well as being performed for entertainment, drama was also significant in some religious rituals, particularly those associated with the goddess Anahita. There is no evidence that drama was in any way related to warfare.

Fishing

Although the ancient Iranians exported considerable quantities of fish, little evidence was found relating to the popularity of fishing as a recreational activity. Woody has noted that ". . . in a nation dominated by warriors, approved sports were military or served some warlike end. Fishing, so commonly linked in modern times with hunting as a sport, had no place in Persia save as an occupation of commoners."[80] To "fish" meant to "hunt fish" and apparently this was not looked upon as being a suitable challenge for the upper classes of society, who preferred to hunt animals.[81] It thus appears that in Iran fishing was an activity pursued by the common people chiefly for economic reasons. This view is supported by the claim that fishing was done exclusively with the use of nets.[82] There is no evidence of angling, with the use of fish hooks, being carried out in either ancient or modern-day Persia.[83]

It is not known whether the Iranian religious beliefs relating

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[80] Woody, op. cit., p. 188.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

to the purity of water had anything to do with the apparent lack of recreational fishing in that civilization.[84] Indeed, apart from the fact that fishing was done with nets, and that it was an economic activity among the lower social classes, very little is known of this activity in ancient Iran.

Swimming and Boating

From most accounts it appears that swimming was not a popular recreational activity among the ancient Iranians. Herodotus stated that during the Battle of Salamis, when ships were sunk, the Greeks could swim to safety, but ". . . on the side of the barbarians more perished by drowning than in any other way, since they did not know how to swim."[85] Even allowing for the fact that this is probably a somewhat biased point of view, it did appear that the majority of Persian soldiers were unfamiliar with swimming.

Strabo mentioned that as a part of their education, Parthian youth were taught to ". . . cross torrential streams in such a way as to keep both armour and clothing dry."[86] This statement does not specifically mention swimming, and indeed it is difficult to imagine the men keeping their clothes and equipment dry while swimming. Probably they waded across streams holding their belongings above their heads, and where this was not possible they probably clung to horses or to the

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[84]See pages 114 and 115 for a description of these beliefs.

[85]Herodotus, The Persian Wars, Trans. George Rawlinson, (New York: Random House, 1942), VIII, 89.

[86]Strabo, op. cit., XV. iii, 18.

sides of boats and rafts.

Firdausi made but one reference to swimming, that being when his mythical hero Rostam was hurled bodily into the sea.

> While falling out of the aether towards the sea, the hero quickly drew his keen sword from his girdle, so that the monsters which attacked him when he descended withdrew affrighted from his onslaught. He swam with his left arm and leg while with his other limbs he sought ways of fending off his attackers, ceasing not a moment from active motion, as is the way of men inured to war. Determining on a certain direction in the water, he at last reached dry land and caught sight of the plain.[87]

It is difficult to imagine just what style of swimming stroke Rostam was using, and this obviously fantastic description does not enable us to obtain any clear insight into how familiar the Iranians were with the techniques of swimming.

Generally it would appear that the ancient Iranians did not participate in swimming to any great extent, and the reasons for this phenomenon are to be found by examining Persian religious beliefs. Ritualistic cleansing formed a significant part of the religious life of the Iranians.[88] For example numerous regulations existed concerning ablution of the hands and face. Apart from these ritual cleansings, the Persians held a superstitious regard for elements such as fire, earth and water, and extraordinary efforts were made to keep them from pollution. "For the Persians neither urinate, nor wash themselves in a river; nor yet bathe therein or cast therein anything dead or any other thing that is considered unclean."[89]

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[87] Levy, op. cit., p. 149.

[88] Woody, op. cit., p. 193.

[89] Strabo, op. cit., XV. iii, 16.

When we consider the powerful influence that religious beliefs exerted over the lives of the Iranians, it is not difficult to see why swimming was not a popular recreational activity. This would have been particularly true during those periods of Iranian history when the Magi exerted their greatest influence. On the other hand, religious convictions were not permitted to interfere with the exigencies of war, as we have already seen that Persian youth were taught to cross torrential streams. Generally however, religious inhibitions prevented the ancient Iranians from participating in swimming.

Although the Persians were familiar with boats for the purposes of trade and war, no evidence was located which suggested that they were ever used for recreational purposes.[90] It is possible that the religious beliefs relating to the purity of water may have inhibited the use of boats for pleasure purposes.

Gymkhana

It is somewhat surprising to learn that among a people who placed great emphasis on good horsemanship, only one reference was made pertaining to gymkhana. During a campaign in Greece, Xerxes organized a gymkhana while he was progressing through Thessaly, as it was reported that the Thessalian cavalry was the best in Greece, and he wished to see how his Persian cavalry would fare against them.[91] Apparently Xerxes' men

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[90]The Peloponnesian wars saw the Persians using ships, both to transport men and materials, and for actual sea battles, the most famous of which was at Thermopylae.

[91]Andrew R. Burn, Persia and the Greeks; the Defence of the West (London: E. Arnold, 1962), p. 393.

"completely outclassed" their Greek opponents.[92]

No mention was made relating to other sporting activities that are frequently associated with modern-day gymkhanas. It is highly probable that gymkhana was used primarily as a part of training for the cavalry divisions of the army. Certainly the drills and competitions associated with gymkhana would have provided men with excellent opportunities to develop the skills of horsemanship. Although no mention was made of them during the Parthian and Sassanian periods, gymkhanas may have been of considerable significance at this time because of the importance of the cavalry divisions during battle.

When Xerxes organized the gymkhana that was described above, he did so largely as a matter of curiosity, and quite probably both spectators and participants enjoyed themselves. However the main motives that would have led to the Iranians participating in gymkhanas would have been to help prepare the cavalry sections of the army for war.

Horse Riding

The importance of the horse among the upper classes of Iranian society can scarcely be over-emphasized. On the other hand, the poorer people were unable to afford an expensive item like a horse, and consequently were unfamiliar with riding. During the Parthian and Sassanian periods, which saw the cavalry assume increasingly significant roles in battle, the popularity of horse riding increased to the extent that it was said of the nobles that ". . . on horses they go to war, to banquets, to public and private tasks, and on them they travel, stay still, do bus-

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[92]Burn, op. cit., p. 393.

iness or chat."[93] Parthian nobles from ages five to twenty four were trained to use the bow, to throw the javelin, to ride horseback and to speak the truth.[94]

Herodotus similarly claimed that the Achaemenians educated their boys from five to twenty years of age, and taught them but three things, riding, archery and honesty.[95] Evidently the love of horses became a passion with some men. For example Cyrus ". . . speedily became the equal of his fellows in horsemanship and soon on account of his love for the sport he surpassed them."[96] A further example of the esteem in which the Achaemenians held their horses is seen by the inscription that Darius had engraved on a monument that he had built when he became king. "Darius son of Hystaspes, aided by the excellence of his horse (here followed the horse's name) and of Oebares his groom, won the kingdom of Persia."[97] The monument itself was carved stone, into which was graven the figure of a horseman. On his tomb Darius saw fit to make yet a further reference to horses, when he had inscribed ". . . I was friend to my friends; as horseman and bowman I proved myself superior to all others."[98]

That the horse played a central part in Iranian life is further illustrated by the fact that a common measure of distance was a day's

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[93] Colledge, op. cit., p. 3.

[94] Strabo, op. cit., XV. iii, 18.

[95] Herodotus, op. cit., I, 136.

[96] Xenophon, Cyropaedia, op. cit., I. iv, 5.

[97] Herodotus, op. cit., III, 88.

[98] Strabo, op. cit., XV. iii, 8.

journey on horseback.[99] The devout prayed to Mithra ". . . whom the horsemen worship on the back of their horses, begging swiftness for their teams."[100] Those who prayed to Ashi Vanguhi the goddess of Fortune:

> . . . have horses swift and loud-neighing; they drive the chariot lightly, they take it to the battle, they bear a gallant praiser (of the gods), who has many horses, a solid chariot, a sharp spear, a long spear, and swift arrows, who hits his arm, pursuing after his enemies, and smiting his foes.[101]

The Iranians had a wide assortment of equipment including saddles, bits and stirrups that were used on horses. The majority of bits were constructed of metal, some were even made from gold. Some elaborate ones were shaped in the form of animals, for example Du Ry showed a photograph of a bronze bit that was shaped in the form of a horse.[102]

Reins were constructed of a single piece of what was probably leather attached at each end to the bit. Most reliefs depicting horse riding showed that short reins were most popular. This permitted the rider to use both hands to fire a bow, as when released, the reins simply rested on the withers of the horse.

Stirrups, which were probably made of metal or leather, first appeared during the Sassanian period. Plate 11 which is of Sassanian

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[99] Woody, op. cit., p. 183.

[100] F. M. Muller (Ed.), The Sacred Books of the East, Vol. III, Part 2, James Darmesteter (Trans.), (New York: The Christian Literature Coy., 1898), p. 122.

[101] Ibid., p. 273.

[102] Carel Du Ry, Art of the Ancient Near and Middle East (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1969), p. 128.

origins, clearly illustrates stirrups, although plates 10 and 13 from the same period do not show them in use. However, the detail of these latter two reliefs is such that stirrups could have been used but are not clearly evident. Where stirrups were not used, the rider sometimes maintained his balance by raising his knees upwards and pressing them against the withers of the horse. Other individuals simply allowed their legs to hang free, and depended on an acute sense of balance to maintain their position on the horse's back.

From the available reliefs it was difficult to give any precise descriptions of saddles. The Parthian shown in Plate 14 was sitting in a type of saddle which did not appear to be much more than a piece of thick cloth doubled over. Plates 15, 16 and 17 show Sassanian kings hunting from horseback, and in all cases there appeared to be a type of square blanket draped over the horse's back, with the saddle then being placed on top of this. As was the case with the Parthian rider, the saddle does not appear to be much more than heavy cloth. Certainly it does not compare with today's bulky western style saddles. The blankets and saddle were fastened to the horse by a series of straps, one of which, the girth strap, passed under the horse, and can be seen in plates 13 and 19. Another strap which was prevalent during Sassanian times, passed back beneath the horse's tail, while a final strap went around the front of the horse just above his chest. Of these straps only the front one can be seen on the horse shown in the Parthian relief (plate 14).

The horses shown in plates 15 and 19 both appear to be wearing bridles. Indeed the shape of the bridles is remarkably similar to the ones used today. Other examples of Sassanian art showed similar brid-

les, which were apparently in common use during that period.[103] Plates 25, 26, 27 and 29 show horses that have been attired with numerous decorative accessories. Some of this finery consisted of pieces of cloth suspended from the front and rear saddle straps, while plates 26, 27 and 29 show small ornaments affixed to the top of the horses' heads. In the majority of cases, the saddles and saddle blankets appear to have been decorated. Most examples of Iranian art depicting horses show the animals' manes as having been closely cropped.

Among the Iranians it is obvious that the Sassanians in particular went to great lengths to make their horses appear as spectacular as possible. From available evidence it would appear that the Achaemenians and Parthians were familiar with rudimentary saddles and bits, but not stirrups. Indeed it was not until the Sassanid period that the use of of bridles, stirrups and more sophisticated forms of the above-mentioned riding accessories became widespread.

It is clearly evident that horse riding was one of the most common recreational activities among the more privileged classes of Iranian society. It formed an integral part of the education of young kings and nobles, and occasionally men may have gone riding for pleasure and relaxation. Horses were also used for hunting, jousting, polo and other related activities, many of which were used to prepare men for war. Indeed one of the primary reasons why so great an emphasis was placed on horsemanship was due to the fact that the cavalry divisions were so vital to the success of the Iranian armies. For example Ardashir, on deciding to increase the strength of his army sent out a directive to all parts

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[103] Du Ry, op. cit., p. 128.

of his realm stating that all parents should ensure that their sons be educated in horsemanship.[104] Although horses would have been used for economic purposes such as carrying messages, their most important uses were in activities related to the preparation of men for war.

Polo

Based on pictorial evidence, some of which has been preserved in the British Museum, it is generally considered by most historians that the game of polo was first developed by the ancient Iranians.[105] While there was very little direct evidence relating to polo during the Achaemenid period, there was a considerable amount of information concerning the popularity of the sport in the Parthian and Sassanid periods. The game was played with a gui (ball) and chugan (stick), and according to Firdausi was played on a meydan or open square of land between two teams of seven men each.[106] However Woody stated that the number of men on the team varied from four to six, and occasionally really large numbers of men formed a side.[107]

Firdausi described numerous accounts of the game. He made one reference to Siyavosh, a Persian hero, who astounded Afrasiyab, king of Turania, with his skill.[108]

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[104] Levy, op. cit., p. 278.

[105] R. Brasch, How Did Sports Begin (New York: David McKay Co., 1970), p. 276.

[106] Levy, op. cit., p. 160.

[107] Woody, op. cit., p. 190.

[108] Levy, op. cit., pp. 97-98.

When the night had passed, the warriors went out on to the square with cavorting and laughter. Said the king of Turan to the prince,

'Let us choose our team-mates for a game of polo. You remain on this side while I take the other, the company being thus divided into two teams.'

'Noble lord,' asked Siyavosh, 'which of these will venture out for the ball? These are your Majesty's escort, whereas I am alone, the only one possessed of an effective mallet. If your majesty will grant leave I will bring horsemen from Iran onto the field, and they will be my mates in playing the game in an appropriate manner on both sides.'

The great general listened to his proposal and concurred with it, whereupon Siyavosh chose out seven Iranians fitted to take part in the contest. The sound of kettle drums spread about the ground, from which the dust arose as high as the sky. You would have said that with the clash of the cymbals and the blare of the trumpets the whole area moved from its place. The commander made the first stroke on the meydan, hitting the ball magnificently high so that it rose into the clouds, but then Siyavosh put spurs to his horse and, when the ball fell within reach, did not let it reach the dust. Instead, he took aim at it as it neared the ground and smote it so high that it disappeared from sight. At that the great king commanded that another ball should be brought to Siyavosh, who placed it to his lips to the accompaniment of a salvo from the bugles and the drums.

He then mounted a fresh horse, threw the ball up out of his hand and struck it with the mallet until it appeared to come alongside the moon. You would have said the sky had sucked it up. Afrasiyab laughed aloud at the play, and, when the nobles had recovered from their amazement, with one voice they declared that they had never seen so notable a horseman in the saddle. The king then told his own team that the ground and the ball were theirs (to show what they could do). There ensued between the two teams a tussle so fierce that the dust rose up to the sun. This way and that, with much talk, the ball passed from one side to the other. Each time the Turks attacked for a goal the Iranians beat them to the ball and frustrated the Turks. Siyavosh was angered and said to the Iranians in the Pahlavi tongue,

'Is this a ground where games are played, or is it a battlefield? Give way and let the Turks take the ball for once.[109]

Under the Parthians, little is known of polo, although Colledge stated that by the second century A.D. the nobility were probably playing polo in addition to their other pursuits.[110] When one considers

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[109]Levy, op. cit., pp. 97 - 98.

[110]Colledge, op. cit., p. 94.

the almost fanatical devotion of the Parthians to their horses, it is highly probable that polo was indeed popular during this period. The game really developed in popularity during the Sassanian period, and many kings, including Ardashir and his son Shapur were excellent players.[111] Indeed Shapur, when he was seven years of age, proved his lineage to Ardashir by his unabashed recovery of a polo ball which fell at the king's feet. The king instructed a slave to:

> 'Go and bring their ball here with a mallet so that I can see which of those boys will approach, boldest of the bold, lion-like, and carry off the ball under my very eyes, taking account of no one. The one who does that will indubitably be my own pure son, of my seed, my stock, and my kin.'
>
> The king's slave departed at his command, struck the ball and bore it ahead of him while mounted on horseback. The boys galloped after him swift as arrows but as they neared Ardashir they stopped short and remained where they stood, having failed to overtake the ball. Shapur the Lion advanced, took possession of the ball before his father's face and carried it off, passing it to the other boys when he had gone some distance away.[112]

Woody also stated that by the end of the Sassanian period, ladies of the court were participating in polo.[113]

The expense of equipment undoubtably made participation in the game of polo a prerogative of the upper classes of Iranian society, and among these individuals polo became almost an obsession. Thus Firdausi stated of Bahram Gur that ". . . polo and hunting became his sole occupations."[114]

Enjoyment was one of the motives that led to the Iranians part-

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[111] Woody, op. cit., p. 189.

[112] Levy, op. cit., p. 275.

[113] Woody, loc. cit.

[114] Levy, op. cit., p. 299.

icipating in the game of polo. One group of players was described as making their way to the playing square ". . . with cavorting and laughter,"[115] and without doubt the exhilaration of playing in a vigorous and often dangerous sport would have been an enjoyable experience for most individuals. Apparently skill in polo, a sport so hard and hazardous, was considered to be a desirable trait of kings and nobles. This was of particular importance to the kings whose reputations were greatly enhanced if they excelled on the polo field. Polo was part of the education of many young nobles and princes. For example Bahram had three teachers.

> One was to teach Bahram the art of letters so as to cleanse his mind of obscurities, one to give him an understanding of the habits of hawk and hunting-panther that kindle the heart, moreover to teach him polo, the use of bow and arrow, how to wield the sword in face to the foe, how to manipulate the reins to right and left and how the head should be kept proudly raised among warriors. The third was to teach him the ways of kings.[116]

Polo would also have been an excellent means of preparing men for battle. The skills of controlling a horse with one hand, so necessary in battle, would certainly have been developed by playing polo. Although preparation for war may not have been a primary reason for the ancient Iranians participating in polo, the experience gained in handling and maneuvering horses while in close proximity to others would have proved invaluable in battle.

Polo was thus one of the most popular recreational activities of the ancient Iranians, although it was restricted to members of the upper classes of society. It steadily increased in popularity, reach-

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[115] Levy, op. cit., p. 97.

[116] Ibid., p. 298.

Plate XXVIII Bahram Gur hunting from camel.

Plate XXIX Shapur II hunting lions from horseback.

Plate XXX Shapur II killing a deer with a sword or dagger.

ing its zenith late in the Sassanian period. The game was an integral part of the education of many young men, and was also played for enjoyment, for enhancing the personal status of the individual involved, and also as a means of preparation for war.

Jousting

With the increasing significance of the cavalry divisions in the Parthian and Sassanian armies jousting became an important tactic in battle. The heavy cavalry, whose members were drawn mainly from the more important nobility, wore protective armour and carried huge lances. Plate XXIII shows two such men in battle. One of them was the Sassanid king Hormizd II, who is depicted unseating his opponent with a thrust of his lance.

Firdausi made numerous references to jousting, including one where the legendary Rostam actually engaged his own son Sohrab, in such an event.

> A narrow arena had been prepared and the men wielded short lances. Soon neither fastenings nor heads remained on the lances and both antagonists twisted their reins leftwards, laying in with Indian swords and striking continuous fire out of the iron.[117]

He also referred to a battle between Bizhan and Palashan, two experienced warriors, who ". . . grappled with each other, stirring up a cloud of black dust. The spearheads were shattered as one met the other, and the warriors stretched out their hands to their swords."[118] Firdausi described yet another account of jousting, this time between Rostam and

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[117] Levy, op. cit., p. 73.

[118] Ibid., p. 119.

and another warrior, Esfandiyar.

> The two warriors had vowed that none should come to their assistance in the conflict. Time and again they attacked with their spears until the nails in their armour flew widespread. Continuing thus till the lance-heads were shattered, perforce the two men had to take to their swords. They whirled the trenchant blades around, galloping left, right and all about, until from the champions' violence and the horses' charges the edges of the scimitars were shorn away. They then stretched out their powerful arms and seized the maces that lay in their saddles. Each on the other rained down blows heavy as boulders bounding down from a height. In that bout both the maces were fractured and the men's arms wearied.[119]

The above scenes strongly resembled the jousting tournaments that were popular during the Middle Ages. While it is certain that the men who comprised the Parthian and Sassanian heavy cavalry divisions participated in some type of practice to develop their skill at impaling or unseating an adversary, no evidence was found that suggested that they held jousting tournaments. However, as the best type of practice would have been against a mounted opponent, it is probable that such contests were held.

If such tournaments were staged, then preparation for battle would have been the primary reason for the men participating in them. Indeed this would have been the main motive regardless of how the Parthians and Sassanians practiced jousting. Secondary motives for participating in jousting would have been relaxation and enjoyment.

Hunting

On the basis of available evidence it appeared that hunting was the most popular of all recreational activities among the ancient Iranians. It can be traced back to Tahmurath, one of the earliest kings of

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[119]Levy, op. cit., p. 182.

the oldest dynasty, who reputedly trained snow leopards and falcons for use in hunting.[120] Regardless of the authenticity of this myth, there is an overwhelming body of evidence which conclusively demonstrates that during the period under consideration, hunting was almost a preoccupation with the privileged classes of Iranian society. Although there is a dearth of information pertaining to the hunting activities of the common people of ancient Iran, it is almost certain that, for a variety of motives, they were familiar with most facets of hunting.

Certainly there existed an abundance of game throughout the Iranian homeland. Mention was made of bears, wild boars, lions, leopards, deer, gazelles, moufflon (hairy wild sheep) and wild asses.[121] Hunting parks or paradises were well stocked with tigers, peacocks, pheasants, and ostriches, as well as some of the animals mentioned above.[122] One relief from the sixth century A.D. showed King Chosroes II hunting a CERVUS DAMA MESOPOTAMICA, a deer-like creature possessing very large horns similar to those of a moose, and thought to be an ancestor of the present-day stag.[123]

Achaemenians

If we are to accept the word of Xenophon, the ancient Achaemenians spent a great deal of their time engaged in hunting ". . . for the

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[120] Woody, op. cit., p. 185.

[121] Xenophon, Cyropaedia, op. cit., I. iv, 7.

[122] Woody, op. cit., p. 188.

[123] Ghirshman, Iran: Parthians and Sassanians, op. cit., p. 212.

reason that the training it gives seems to be the best preparation for war itself."[124] The same writer also stated that hunting was considered to be so important that not only did the king himself participate, but saw to it that others took part.[125] Arrangements were made to pay for such activities from the public treasury, although only the privileged classes of society were subsidized in their hunting activities.[126] The poorer people probably hunted more to obtain food than to prepare themselves for battle.

Through Xenophon's description of the education of Cyrus, it was possible to obtain considerable insight into the significant role played by hunting in the life of a king. Cyrus' early hunting exploits were confined to the comparative safety of a park which was well stocked with wild animals.[127] Astyages, who was Cyrus' grandfather, made his grandson hunt within the confines of the park, where the ever-present guards were ready to assist him in the event of a misshap. As an added precaution, the animals in the park were, by Cyrus' account, lean and mangy and sometimes maimed.[128]

Eventually Astyages permitted Cyrus to hunt in open territory, but only under the close supervision of Cyaxares whose task it was to ". . . keep him away from dangerous places and guard him against wild

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[124]Xenophon, Cyropaedia, op. cit., I. ii, 10.

[125]Ibid.

[126]Ibid., I. ii, 15.

[127]Ibid., I. iv, 4-7.

[128]Ibid., I. iv, 11.

beasts, in case any should appear."[129] Prior to beginning this hunt, Cyrus ". . . eagerly enquired of those who attended him what animals one ought not to approach and what animals one might pursue without fear."[130]

> And they told him that bears and boars and lions and leopards had killed many who came close to them but that deer and gazelles and wild sheep and wild asses were harmless. And they said this also, that one must be on one's guard against dangerous places no less than against wild beasts; for many riders had been thrown over precipices, horses and all.[131]

Contemporary descriptions would lead us to believe that the Achaemenian royal hunts were equally as grandiose as those of the Assyrians. "But when the king goes out hunting, he takes out half the garrison; and this he does many times a month."[132] The king was ". . . accompanied by a great retinue, frequently including even musicians."[133] Unlike the Assyrians there was no evidence to suggest that hunts which were held in parks were attended by spectators. Rather, as has been previously mentioned, such hunts were designed more to acquaint young princes with the various techniques of hunting than for anything else.

Hunting was usually done from horseback, and it is known that the legendary Rostam went to considerable pains to obtain a horse of exceptional speed and courage.

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[129] Xenophon, Cyropaedia, op. cit., I. iv, 7.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Ibid.

[132] Ibid., I. ii, 9.

[133] Woody, op. cit., p. 188.

> One morning, Rostam was gloomy of spirit when he arose, and proposed to go hunting. He made himself ready, filled his quiver with arrows and flung his leg over Rakhsh (his horse), which he roused to a gallop, turning his face towards the Turanian plain. Like a bloodthirsty lion he sought about for game and as he approached the hunting-ground he saw that it swarmed with onagers. The cheeks of the bestower of crowns (Rostam) glowed like a rose. He laughed aloud as he put spurs to Rakhsh, and with bow and arrow, club and rope he brought down birds and beasts in number.[134]

Cyrus, one of Persia's more outstanding kings, also did most, if not all, of his hunting from horseback. On his first hunting excursion he saw a deer break cover and he:

> . . . forgot everything that he had heard and gave chase, seeing nothing but the direction in which it was making. And somehow his horse in taking a leap fell upon its knees and almost threw him over its head. However, Cyrus managed, with some difficulty, to keep his seat, and his horse got up. And when he came to level ground, he threw his spear and brought down the deer--a fine, large quarry.[135]

One seal (see plate XVIII) does show a figure purported to be Darius, hunting lions from a chariot. However, little supporting evidence was found that showed that the popularity of this type of hunting even approached the level it enjoyed under the Assyrians, which is somewhat surprising in view of the fact that chariots remained in common use up till the end of the Achaemenid period.

Another seal from the Achaemenian period (see plate XIX) showed a figure on foot hunting lions. Again this was not popular with the kings and nobles, but was the common form of hunting among the poorer people. At the same time, the privileged classes of society were familiar with hunting on foot. Xenophon stated that when the nobles went

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[134] Levy, op. cit., p. 64.

[135] Xenophon, Cyropaedia, op. cit., I. iv, 8.

hunting they carried ". . . a light shield and two spears, one to throw, the other to use in case of necessity in a hand-to-hand encounter."[136]

Evidence was found which suggested that the Achaemenians were familiar with the use of trained birds and animals in hunting. Firdausi made reference to these practices when he described Rostam teaching a youth ". . . hawking, falconry and how to hunt with the cheetah."[137] Although the Iranians imported hunting dogs from India, it is not known when this practice was common.[138] As neither Herodotus nor Xenophon mentioned the use of falcons and trained animals, it is doubtful whether this form of hunting was really popular with the Achaemenians.

Among the ancient Iranians the bow and arrow were the favourite weapons for the chase.[139] Xenophon mentioned that when the king and his garrison went hunting ". . . those who go must take bow and arrows and, in addition to the quiver, a sabre or bill in its scabbard; they carry along also a light shield and two spears."[140] Although the bow and the arrow were important weapons, spears were also frequently used for hunting. Thus as well as killing a deer with a spear, Cyrus ". . . saw a boar rushing straight toward him, he rode to meet him and aiming well

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[136] Xenophon, Cyropaedia, op. cit., I. ii, 9.

[137] Levy, op. cit., p. 83.

[138] Woody, op. cit., p. 188.

[139] Ibid., p. 189.

[140] Xenophon, loc. cit.

he struck the boar between the eyes and brought him down."[141]

There was no available information that related to the common people of the Achaemenian period hunting with spears. It has been noted that the upper classes of society usually hunted from horseback, in which case they would have been able to get sufficiently close to most animals to use spears. However, the poorer people, without the use of horses, would have had to stalk their game of foot, and to get within spear-throwing range would have been painstakingly difficult. Consequently, one would suspect that due to the greater range attainable the bow and arrow would have been preferred.

Woody mentioned that the Achaemenians were familiar with the use of hunting nets, but did not describe how they were used.[142] The presence of large numbers of animals in hunting parks would suggest that some men were employed by the kings to capture alive such animals, and these hunters would have undoubtably relied upon nets to assist them in their work.

According to the work of Firdausi, lassos were widely used to capture game. Rostam is reputed to have hunted with rope, and on one occasion tried to lasso an onager.[143] No further information relating to the use of lassos in hunting was located, although it is known that large numbers of men in the army used lassos.[144] Consequently it was

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[141]Xenophon, Cyropaedia, op. cit., I. iv, 8.

[142]Woody, op. cit., p. 188.

[143]Levy, op. cit., p. 148.

[144]Herodotus, op. cit., VIII, 85.

not possible to formulate any definite conclusions pertaining to the popularity of hunting with lassos during this period.

By far the vast majority of information pertaining to hunting during this period dealt with the king and the privileged classes of society. Despite a lack of evidence relating to the hunting activities of the common people, it is certain that they did in fact hunt quite regularly. They would have done so primarily as a means of supplementing their diet, and as they hunted on foot, the type of game pursued would have been mainly small or non-dangerous in nature.

Parthians

Evidence pertaining to hunting among the Parthians was both limited in extent, and also related almost exclusively to the more privileged groups of society. Colledge stated that the chief love of the kings and nobility was the hunt.[145] As an example of their enthusiasm for this pastime, the Parthian king Vardanes offered the aged Greek philosopher Apollonius of Tyana a day's hunting near Babylon.[146] King Vonones was rejected for his alleged dislike of hunting, although the real reason was probably because of his Roman background.[147] The very fact that the Parthians used the excuse of a disinterest in hunting to depose their king, serves to underline the importance they attached to the sport. Artabanus III, when forced to flee the regions east of the Caspian, found no difficulty in supporting himself by the bow.[148]

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[145] Colledge, op. cit., p. 94.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid.

Wild animals were often contained in a park or paradise, but no mention was made about whether these animals were hunted or simply looked at.[149] However one suspects that they were probably used for hunting, in a fashion similar to that of the Achaemenians. While there were no actual descriptions of hunting excursions, Colledge mentioned a "master of the Royal Hunts," which suggested that large retinues of nobles accompanied the king on organized hunting forays.[150] We have no means of determining whether musicians accompanied these hunts.

That the Parthians were excellent horsemen is an acknowledged fact, and consequently most of the hunting done by the upper classes of society was done from horseback. Indeed Strabo stated that the Persians hunted ". . . by throwing spears from horseback, and with bows and slings."[151] There was little or no mention of the use of chariots in the Parthian armies, as they seem to have been replaced by the highly maneuverable cavalry divisions. Therefore it is unlikely that chariots were used for hunting as was the case with the Achaemenians.

Although nets[152] and slings were used, the principle weapons would have been the bow and the spear. Towards the end of the Parthian period, jousting grew in popularity, and the use of spears from horseback became more frequent. Indeed, one seal impression dating from the Parthian period showed a man on horseback armed with a lance killing an

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[149] Colledge, op. cit., p. 94.

[150] Ibid., p. 64.

[151] Strabo, op. cit., XV. iii, 18.

[152] Ibid.

animal.[153] A bas-relief from the same period showed a figure armed with a spear and mounted on a horse attacking a lion.[154]

Strabo claimed that slings were also used when hunting. This weapon, with its long range could have been used by members of the poorer classes of society who hunted on foot. However its limited accuracy over greater distances could have led to most hunters discarding slings in favour of the bow. Certainly there was no indication of the upper classes ever having used them.

Hunting with the bow was popular throughout the Parthian period. One relief showed a horseman armed with bow and arrows pursuing wild[155] boar and eland, while another depicted a mounted hunter also armed with bow and arrows hunting onagers.[156] The "Parthian shot," a difficult acrobatic-like feat performed from horseback, would almost certainly have been practiced during hunting excursions. For this shot, the rider would pretend that he was retreating from the enemy, whereas in actual fact he would maintain a reasonable distance between himself and his foe, and then at varying intervals, would turn around and fire his bow. The accuracy with which the Parthians used this shot has been well attested. During the time that the archer was shooting, the reins rested on the horse's withers (see page 148 of this work for a complete description of the Parthian shot), and the horse was probably controlled by

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[153] Ghirshman, Iran: Parthians and Sassanians, op. cit., p. 30.

[154] Ibid., p. 106.

[155] Ibid., p. 51.

[156] Ibid., pp. 49-50.

pressure from the rider's knees. One relief showed a mounted archer hunting wild onagers, and in this instance the hunter had the arrow sheath fastened to the right side of his saddle.[157] This innovation would have further facilitated the ease with which the rider could turn in his saddle and fire his bow.

No evidence pertaining to hunting activities among the lower classes of Parthian society was located. Despite this, one can categorically state that they would have hunted, probably frequently, and primarily for economic reasons and as a means of preparation for war. In a similar manner to the lower classes of Achaemenian society, most of the hunting done by the less wealthy Parthians would not have been from horseback, and undoubtably the most popular weapon would have been the bow.

Sassanians

There is a considerable body of evidence relating to hunting activities among the privileged classes of Sassanian society. Rock carvings depicted highly organized royal hunting expeditions which appeared to have been as elaborately staged as those held by the Assyrian monarchs. Unfortunately, as was the case with the other ancient civilizations under discussion, very little reference was made to hunting activities among the common people.

Again it appears that the bow was the favourite weapon when hunting. Plate XXVIII shows a king mounted on a camel shooting at deer, while plate XXIX depicts a king hunting lions. This latter figure showed that the Sassanians were familiar with the "Parthian shot," as the

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[157]Ghirshman, op. cit., pp. 49-50.

king had turned around in his saddle and was firing an arrow at a lion which was behind him. Plate XXVI illustrated a very similar hunting scene, while plates XXV and XXVII showed mounted figures hunting a variety of game that included stags, wild boars and lions.

Two reliefs dated to the fifth century A.D. both show that highly organized royal hunts were popular during that period. One of the reliefs depicted a royal boar hunt which appeared to take place in a marshland area.[158] The king, seated in a boat, was armed with bow and arrows, and was accompanied by female musicians playing harps. Men mounted on elephants were acting as beaters to chase the boars close to the king in order that he might shoot them. Other men, also mounted on elephants were engaged in carrying away the dead boars.

A royal stag hunt was shown in considerable detail on the second relief. The first section depicted the king mounted on horseback setting out for the hunt, while in the background female musicians were sitting on a raised platform playing instruments that looked like harps.[159] The second part of the scene showed the king, armed with bow and arrows, galloping after the hunt. Attendants were shown releasing stags through gates into the hunting area, which appeared to be an enclosed park. At all times the king was shown accompanied by other armed horsemen, who appeared to be taking no part in the hunt and we may reasonably assume that their purpose was to protect the monarch in the event of misshap. This hunting scene is reminiscent of the ones held by the Assyrians in

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[158] Ghirshman, Iran: Parthians and Sassanians, op. cit., pp. 194-6.

[159] Ibid., p. 199.

their parks. These two reliefs clearly demonstrate that in contrast to the Achaemenians, the Sassanian kings did not use parks simply to develop the skills of hunting.

Hunting in open areas was also popular with the Sassanians. One relief dating to the third century A.D. showed a large number of animals being pursued by two hunters on horseback.[160] Another scene depicted four men on horseback armed with spears attacking a herd of wild boars.[161] There is no evidence that either of these scenes occurred in a park.

Further insight into royal hunting excursions outside of confined parks was obtained from descriptions of the hunting exploits of Bahram Gur.

> A week later the lord of the world went out to the chase accompanied by his priests and nobles, purposing to remain hunting and drinking wine with his retinue for a whole month. The time passed in the taking of great quantities of the game which roamed both on the mountains and on the plain; and then the monarch turned happily back to the town with his retinue.[162]

The bow was the most popular hunting weapon among all classes of Sassanian society, and fabulous stories were told of the accuracy with which this weapon was used. For example, Firdausi, in writing of Bahram Gur's hunting exploits tells us:

> Bahram Gur ("The Wild Ass") strung his bow and raised a shout in that silent waste. In his quiver he had an arrow with two heads, which he kept for hunting on the plain. As soon as the gazelles were in flight the prince shot away the horns on the head of the

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[160] Ghirshman, Iran: Parthians and Sassanians, op. cit., p. 183.

[161] Ibid., p. 187.

[162] Levy, op. cit., p. 306.

> fleeing buck, using the arrow with the double head, whereat the girl was filled with amazement. The buck's head being shorn of its black horns at once came to look like a doe. Then the hunter shot two arrows at the doe's head at the places where horns might grow. Instead of horns there were now two arrows, the doe's blood reddening its breast. Now he urged the camel towards the other pair while he placed two pebbles in the bow. One he shot into the ear of one of the gazelles, greatly to his pleasure, for which he had reason, seeing that the gazelle immediatley scratched its ear. At that moment he fixed an arrow into his bow and with it pinned together the creature's head, ear and hind leg.[163]

Lukonin showed a photograph of a partly gilded silver plate which depicted this particular incident.[164] Apart from such legends, numerous reliefs depict the use of the bow in hunting. Mention has already been made of two reliefs depicting royal hunting scenes (see page 195) where bows and arrows were the weapons used. Two silver bowls were found with engravings that showed kings mounted on horses hunting a variety of wild life with bows and arrows.[165] A silver dish dated to the third or fourth century A.D. depicted a king hunting lions, and here again the king was mounted and armed with bow and arrows.[166] He had fatally wounded one lion and was turning in his saddle and shooting at another one, in what resembled the famous Parthian shot. Yet another silver bowl showed King Shapur II mounted and armed with bow and arrow hunting lions.[167] One lion was mortally wounded, while another reared up under attack while the king turned in his saddle preparing to execute a Parthian

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[163] Levy, op. cit., p. 300.

[164] Lukonin, op. cit., pl. 141.

[165] Ghirshman, Iran: Parthians and Sassanians, op. cit., pp. 207-8.

[166] Ibid., p. 208.

[167] Ibid., p. 212.

Plate XXXI Sassanian banquet scene.

Plate XXXII Iranian jugglers and acrobats.

Plate XXXIII Engraved silver bowl depicting musical scenes.

shot.

Hunting with spears was not as popular with the Sassanians as it was with the Achaemenians. One relief that was located showed four men on horseback armed with spears, attacking a herd of wild boars.[168] When describing the hunting exploits of Sassanian kings, Firdausi never mentioned the use of spears. Rather in all cases, the bow was the primary weapon.

There is some evidence to support the fact that swords and daggers were used in hunting. A silver dish showed a figure which was probably Shapur II killing a deer with his sword or knife.[169] A relief dating to the third to fourth century A.D. depicted two hunters, one of whom was armed with both a sword and a bow. Probably the sword or knife was used as a means of defence when the hunter had to face an animal at close range, and also was a means of delivering a coup de grace. Firdausi described a hunting expedition against wild boars which seemed to substantiate this opinion.

> He rushed into the wood as a lion might, and hotly he affixed a string to his bow. Like Spring thunder he rumbled forth and like the rain he beat down the leaves from the trees; while, tempered-steel dagger in hand, he pursued the swine like a raging elephant. One boar charged at him like Ahriman and with its tusks pierced Bizhan's armour; for, as though they were steel files on hard stone, the boar had ground its tusks against a tree. But he thrust a dagger into its chest and cut its mammoth body in twain.[170]

The use of trained birds and animals in hunting was quite common among the Sassanians. Firdausi mentioned one instance where a

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[168] Ghirshman, Iran: Parthians and Sassanians, op. cit., p. 187.

[169] Ibid., p. 213.

[170] Levy, op. cit., p. 133.

group of soldiers were sent to the Arman region to kill wild boars which were causing trouble to the inhabitants.[171] The men ". . . set forth with panther and falcon with which to hunt game on the long road."[172] No mention was made of the panthers and falcons being used in the boar hunt, and it seems probable that they were only used to find game to feed the men during the long journey. As part of his education Bahram I had one instructor whose task it was to impart ". . . an understanding of the habits of hawk and hunting-panther."[173] Apparently Bahram was impressed with what he learned, for on one of his later hunting excursions he took panthers, hawks, kestrels and falcons with him. "All were to journey to Turan in search of game and the chase was to be continued for a month."[174]

A later king is said to have had a hunting retinue which included:

> . . . seven hundred falconers with sparrow-hawks, lanners and royal falcons. After the falconers came three hundred men on horseback all bearing panthers. There were also there seventy lions and leopards attached to chains firmly fastened and wearing coats of Chinese brocade, and there were other leopards and lions trained and muzzled with gold chains. Also there were seven hundred hounds collared in gold which seize gazelle at the gallop. Accompanying all were two thousand minstrels ready to play airs on hunting days.[175]

No references were located pertaining to the use of trained animals and birds by the common people, and due to the great amount of time necess-

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[171] Levy, op. cit., p. 153.

[172] Ibid.

[173] Ibid., p. 298.

[174] Ibid., p. 309.

[175] Ibid., p. 379.

ary to train such animals and birds, it is probable that their use was restricted primarily to the more privileged classes of society.

That hunting was an extremely popular activity among the ancient Iranians cannot be doubted. It was pursued for a number of motives including for pleasure, as a means of preparation for war, for economic reasons, and in the case of kings, ". . . skill in hunting was a standard by which kingly quality was measured."[176]

While there is no evidence that categorically stated that the ancient Iranians hunted for pleasure, it is certain that on the majority of hunting excursions, the men enjoyed themselves. On one of his early hunting expeditions Cyrus ". . . was greatly delighted," after he had killed a large deer.[177] Judging by the nature of the large retinues that accompanied some of the Sassanian royal hunts, these expeditions were undoubtably meant to be enjoyable. On some of his hunting excursions Khosrow had 2,000 minstrels ready to entertain the hunters.[178] Firdausi stated that on one occasion Bahram Gur, together with numerous priests and nobles went hunting and "drinking wine" for a whole month.[179] Generally, however, it is difficult to assess how many men and boys would have hunted "for the sport of it," which is a primary motive among many modern-day hunters.

Among the ancient Iranians, hunting was considered to be an

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[176]Woody, op. cit., p. 187.

[177]Xenophon, Cyropaedia, op. cit., I. iv, 8.

[178]Levy, op. cit., p. 379.

[179]Ibid., p. 306.

excellent means of preparing men for battle. Indeed if we are to believe Xenophon, it was the single most important reason why the Achaemenians hunted. He stated that:

> . . . it accustoms them to rise early in the morning and to endure both heat and cold, and it gives them practice in taking long tramps and runs, and they have to shoot or spear a wild beast whenever it comes in their way. And they must often whet their courage when one of the fierce beasts shows fight; for, of course, they must strike down the animal that comes to close quarters with them, and they must be on their guard against the one that threatened to attack them. In a word, it is not easy to find any quality required in war that is not required also in the chase.[180]

Some hunting excursions lasted for several days, during which time the young men had to survive on limited rations, and they did this ". . . to harden themselves, in order that, if ever it is necessary in war, they may be able to do the same."[181] When they were not hunting, the young men were continually ". . . shooting with the bow and hurling the spear and practicing all the other arts."[182] It does appear as though the hunt, which enabled men to chase and kill elusive game, was considered by the Achaemenians to be the ultimate form of training in the preparation of men for war.

Xenophon's description of the education of Persian youth referred only to those young men whose parents were able to ". . . maintain their children without work."[183] Young men who belonged to less privileged classes of society would have been more occupied with earning a

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[180] Xenophon, Cyropaedia, op. cit., I. ii, 10.

[181] Ibid., I. ii, 11.

[182] Ibid., I. ii, 12.

[183] Ibid., I. ii, 15.

living than in daily hunting excursions. Undoubtably many of them would have frequently hunted small game, but more as a means of obtaining food than for any other reason. The same was undoubtably true of the common people during the Parthian and Sassanian periods. Due to the lack of overall evidence pertaining to hunting among the lower classes of society in ancient Iran, it was not possible to make any firm statements concerning their motives for hunting. However the thought of having to serve in the army would have been ever-present in their minds, and many young men would have used hunting to develop and maintain the skills used in war.

During the Parthian and Sassanian periods the upper classes undoubtably viewed hunting as an excellent means of preparing themselves for battle. Cavalry became increasingly important in warfare during the first six centuries A.D., and in order to practice the various skills involved in this form of combat, many Iranians hunted almost exclusively from horseback. There was little or no evidence that the privileged classes hunted on foot. Some reliefs showed Parthians and Sassanians using the Parthian shot while hunting (see plate XXVI), and no doubt a great deal of their prowess in using this tactic in battle was developed while hunting. During this same period, jousting became an established form of combat, and there was clear evidence that this particular skill was developed and maintained on hunting excursions. A seal impression from the Parthian period (see plate XXI) depicted a man on horseback armed with a lance, killing an animal, while a relief from the Sassanian period showed four men on horseback attacking wild boars

with spears.[184] Because it would have been far easier to kill animals with the use of the bow, it is highly likely that when hunting with lances, the Iranians were concerned almost exclusively in developing and perfecting some of the skills of jousting in preparation for battle.

When examining the reasons behind the ancient Iranians' passion for hunting, it was found necessary to carefully consider economic motives. Both the Achaemenian and Sassanian kings hunted animals in enclosed parks, and it would have been necessary to have large numbers of captured animals on hand to replace the ones that were killed. Quite conceivably large groups of men were employed to trap such beasts. These hunters probably used nets to snare the animals, and certainly their motives for hunting were strictly economic, as were those of the lower classes of society, who hunted primarily as a means of supplementing their diet.

On one occasion during the Sassanian period, the inhabitants of the region of Arman asked Khosrow for assistance over the losses they were suffering from the ravages of wild boars.[185] Accordingly the king dispatched Bizhan, one of his best warriors, together with several of the latter's friends, to the troubled region. When they arrived wild boar were evident everywhere, and in a very short time Bizhan had succeeded in exterminating all of them. The motive that led to this particular hunt taking place was economic, in that it was necess-

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[184] Ghirshman, Iran: Parthians and Sassanians, op. cit., p. 187.

[185] Levy, op. cit., p. 150.

ary to protect the livelihood of a large group of people.

During military campaigns, hunting took place as a means of supplying food for the soldiers. For example, during one campaign, Cyrus sent men out to obtain meat.

> There were not trees but there was a great variety of animal life. Wild asses were very common and there were many ostriches; also there were bustards and gazelles. The cavalry hunted all these animals on various occasions. In the case of the wild asses, when anyone chased them, they ran ahead and then stopped still; for they ran much faster than the horses. Then again, when the horses got near, they would do the same thing, and it was impossible to catch them except by stationing the horsemen at intervals from each other and hunting in relays. The flesh of those that were caught was very like venison, only more tender. No one succeeded in catching an ostrich. Indeed the horsemen who tried soon gave up the pursuit, as it made them go a very great distance when it ran from them. It used its feet for running and got under way with its wings, just as if it was using a sail. But one can catch bustards if one puts them up quickly, as they only fly a little way, like partridges, and soon get tired. Their flesh was delicious.[186]

Such a hunt clearly illustrates several of the different motives that the Iranians had for hunting. First and foremost, the hunt took place for economic reasons, in that food was necessary to help feed the army. That the hunt was also used to help keep soldiers active and well prepared for battle is highly probable, and although pleasure and relaxation may not have been primary motives, the men who participated in the chase would have enjoyed it.

Many of the hunts enjoyed by Iranian royalty were similar to those held by the Assyrians in that they involved the large-scale slaughter of animals. Such hunts were highly organized and the king was frequently accompanied by large retinues of soldiers and spectators. They were sometimes held in confined spaces or parks where the

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[186]Xenophon, The Persian Expedition, op. cit., p. 36.

king had no difficulty in seeking out and killing many animals. The motives for these royal hunts were two-fold. First, they enabled the king to relax and enjoy himself, while at the same time to keep in sound physical condition. Xenophon mentioned that Cyrus had a park full of wild animals that ". . . he used to hunt on horseback when he wanted exercise for himself and his horses."[187] Second, if a king was able to slaughter large numbers of wild beasts, then his personal prestige and qualities of fearlessness and leadership were greatly enhanced. Thus Cyrus was greatly admired for his courage.

> When he got to the age for hunting, he was most enthusiastic about it, and only too ready to take risks in his encounters with wild animals. There was one occasion when a she-bear charged him and he, showing no fear, got to grips with the animal and was pulled off his horse. The scars from the wounds he got then were still visible on his body, but he killed the animal in the end.[188]

Parthian kings were expected to display hunting prowess as an indication of their ability to lead. The Sassanian rulers participated in highly organized hunts accompanied by musicians and spectators, indicating that such excursions were meant to be enjoyable.[189] Further, during these hunts the king usually stationed himself in a relatively fixed position and had soldiers chase the game past him.[190] In such cases the king was the only individual who killed the animals, and by demonstrating his skill and ability in hunting, he was able to enhance his "kingly qualities."

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[187] Xenophon, The Persian Expedition, op. cit., p. 21.

[188] Ibid., p. 52.

[189] Ghirshman, Iran: Parthians and Sassanians, op. cit., p. 194.

[190] Ibid.

In clear contrast to the Assyrians, there is no concrete evidence to show that the Iranians hunted for religious reasons. One impression of a cylinder seal depicted Darius hunting lions from a chariot, and being blessed by the winged sun disk, symbol of the god Ahuramazda.[191] However there was no evidence to suggest that some of the slain animals were offered to the gods, or that the Iranians felt impelled to hunt in order to appease their gods.

It is clearly evident that hunting was an extremely popular activity in ancient Iran. It is also clear that no one particular reason can be advanced that satisfactorily explains why the Iranians hunted. In order to even begin to explain the role of hunting it is necessary to examine a number of factors, including the social class of the individual involved, economic motives, pleasure and relaxation, and educational requirements, and preparation for war. Among the lower social classes hunting was used primarily as a means of supplementing the diet and to prepare men for war. One of the major reasons why the more privileged groups of Iranian society hunted was to prepare themselves for war. However, sufficient evidence was found to indicate that enjoyment and relaxation were important motives during the numerous highly organized royal hunts that were staged in enclosed parks. Apart from hunting for enjoyment, and as a means of preparing themselves for war, the Iranian kings also hunted to display courage and leadership ability.

Gymnastics and Juggling

Acrobatics and juggling were familiar to all ancient Iranians,

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[191]Du Ry, op. cit., p. 151.

but the limited surviving evidence relating to these activities prohibits its definitive conclusions as to the extent of their popularity. During the Sassanian period jesters, jugglers, and clowns, as well as musicians provided entertainment for the king and his court.[192] That the Parthians were familiar with these activities is evidenced by the fact that they sent ". . . exotic presents, ostrich eggs and conjurers, to excite the interest of the Chinese emperor."[193] Plate 32 shows small plaques from the Parthian period which depict both dancers and one figure performing a head stand. There was no mention of any of these activities from the Achaemenian period, and, in general, it seemed that the ancient Iranians did not consider gymnastics and juggling very important activities. Audiences would have derived considerable pleasure and enjoyment from watching the acrobats, jesters and other similar entertainers, and indeed, this was probably the only reason for the existence of these performers.

Zoological Gardens

The Achaemenians had parks in which they kept wild animals. For example Cyrus kept a palace at the city of Celanae, with a large park well stocked with animals that the king used to hunt.[194] One important function of these parks was to enable young princes to obtain early instruction in the skills of hunting.[195] While no mention was made of the

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[192]Ghirshman, Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest, op. cit., p. 312.

[193]Colledge, op. cit.; p. 78.

[194]Xenophon, The Persian Expedition, op. cit., p. 21.

[195]Xenophon, Cyropaedia, op. cit., I. iv, 5.

parks being used as zoological gardens where people were permitted to simply look at the confined animals, it is possible that this was sometimes the case. However, it appears that the primary purpose of such parks was to have animals available that would allow the kings to hunt whenever they were so inclined.

The Parthians had zoological gardens which were similar to those of the Assyrians.[196] While no mention was made of which social classes were permitted to view the animals, it is probable that this activity was a prerogative of the kings and nobility. It is not known whether the Parthians hunted within the confines of parks.

On the other hand, the Sassanian kings frequently hunted in parks, but we are not informed of whether they used these paradises to merely view the captured animals. In general it appeared that while the Iranian parks may have been used as zoological gardens where people were permitted to view the animals in captivity, their main purpose was for hunting.

Board Games

Firdausi[197] stated that an Indian rajah sent a Sassanian king, probably Shapur II, a game of chess, and that Hormizd II was also familiar with the game. However, apart from these isolated references, no concrete evidence was located that made it possible to obtain any indication of the popularity of board games in ancient Iran.

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[196]Colledge, op. cit., p. 193.

[197]Levy, op. cit., p. 327.

Toys

Fraser[198] stated that the Iranians had toys from 1100 B.C. onward. The toys located were all similar in design, comprising of the figure of an animal mounted on a small four-wheeled wooden base. A string was passed through a hole in the base, and a child could then use this to pull the toy along. Fraser[199] showed photographs of two such toys, one of which was in the form of a porcupine, and the other a lion.

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[198] Fraser, A History of Toys, p. 26.

[199] Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this work, reference has frequently been made to the difficulty of drawing concrete conclusions regarding the role played by recreational activities in ancient Iran and Assyria. This difficulty is due to the lack of comprehensive information relating not only to recreational activities, but to many other facets of both civilizations. In particular, the lack of relevant information pertaining to the lower classes of society made it all but impossible to form any definite statements concerning their recreational habits. As numerous Assyrian and Persian kings took pains to leave evidence of their greatness in the form of bas-reliefs, sculptures and written word, it was possible to obtain a far more concise view of their recreational behaviour. However, it remains an inescapable fact that any historical analysis relating to the social behaviour of the majority of ancient civilizations is hindered by a lack of available information, which in turn necessarily limits the depth of the study. At best, many of the concluding remarks made in this work resulted from the piecing together of available information to form tentative ideas of what probably took place. The instances where definite conclusions could be drawn were relatively few in number.

One phenomenon that immediately became apparent from the study was the lack of evidence relating to organized team games. Apart from polo, which the Assyrians did not play, the rest of the activities were characterized either by individuals competing against each other,[1]

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[1]Examples of this type of activity included archery contests, board games, dice, jousting, boxing and wrestling.

or by activities that required little or no cooperation between individuals.[2] Some of the latter type of activities including banquets, hunting and the enjoyment of singing and music were undoubtably more enjoyable when done with others, but the fact remains that they were individual-oriented.

Only in isolated instances did the Assyrians or Persians participate in recreational activities for only one apparent reason.[3] In most cases it was necessary to employ a variety of motives to explain why individuals participated in certain activities. Men were motivated by economic factors, by a need to be educated, by religious influences, by a desire to enjoy themselves and by a desire to be entertained, and by a need to prepare themselves for warfare. Thus archery was a part of the education of most boys; it was used by men who hunted for a livelihood; it was very important in preparing men for battle, and on many occasions the individuals participating in archery would have enjoyed themselves. In a like manner, chariot driving and hunting were participated in for a similar variety of interwoven motives.[4]

In many instances one individual likely participated in a particular recreational activity for different reason than did another person. For example, in ancient Iran some people would have earned their livelihood by being jugglers and acrobats, in which case they were economically

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[2]Examples of this type of activity included athletics, boating, fishing, horse riding, hunting and singing.

[3]Examples of activities participated in for one reason only included board games, dice, toys and zoological gardens.

[4]Further examples included all those activities that were not listed in footnote 3 above.

motivated. On the other hand for those who watched these performers, enjoyment derived from being entertained was the reason for their secondary-level "participation" in the activities. Similarly, professional musicians participated for economic reasons, while spectators listened for pleasure. At the same time music was a significant part of some religious festivals, in which case yet a further motive had to be called upon to completely explain the role of music in Assyria and Persia. With regard to swimming, it is important to note the reluctance that the Iranians displayed towards participating in this activity because of religious convictions.

In both civilizations studied it was found that in some circumstances only individuals from certain social strata took part in selected activities. For example, due to the expense involved, jousting, horse riding, chariot driving and polo were all prerogatives of the wealthier classes of society. Fishing was not considered a pastime worthy of the Iranian kings, and consequently was only practised by the common people, and then as far as can be determined strictly as an economic activity. In some situations members of the different social classes participated in the same recreational activities, but under vastly different circumstances. Thus in ancient Iran boys of the more privileged classes of society took part in highly organized tournaments and competitions where prizes were offered by the king. However, among the poorer members of society competitions and tournaments were more informally organized, usually among and by the boys themselves.

In hunting, the common people would not have had the chance to use horses, and were consequently limited in the scope and extent of their hunting activities. On the other hand, the wealthier classes of

society, who could afford horses, were able to pursue the swiftest game, and were also able to hunt more dangerous beasts knowing that in most cases, their horse was fast enough to keep them at a safe distance from their quarry. Needless to say, hunting from chariots was strictly a prerogative of the privileged members of Iranian and Assyrian society.

The reasons why the Iranians and Assyrians participated in recreational activities were quite similar although some differences became evident. For example, the Persian religion, with its superstitious regard for the natural elements, did inhibit swimming and related aquatic activities in ancient Iran, whereas the Assyrians had no such beliefs, and swimming and boating were quite popular. On the other hand, the Assyrian kings in particular attached considerable religious significance to hunting, whereas there was no substantial evidence that suggested the Iranians felt this way. Indeed, the only apparent differences between the motives underlying the Assyrians and Persians participating in recreational activities had religious connotations.

One of the major purposes of this study was to evaluate the influences of warfare on the recreational activities of the ancient Assyrians and Persians. It has already been established that the history of both civilizations was marked by a high frequency of warfare, and it was hypothesized that this would have had a pronounced effect on the nature of the recreational activities participated in by the peoples of these two civilizations.

Of the recreational activities discussed, fully half of those identified in the literature and in art objects, were of such a nature that they could have been used to prepare men for the physical skills necessary for warfare. Of these activities, archery, spear throwing,

boxing, horse riding, chariot driving, jousting and wrestling were in themselves activities that would have been used at some stage during a battle.[5] In addition, gymkhana, athletics, competitions and tournaments, hunting and polo all incorporated skills that were frequently employed in warfare. Battles were occasionally fought from boats or ships, and Assyrian soldiers were often called upon to use their ability to swim in order to place soldiers in strategic positions during the course of a campaign.

In most cases it was difficult to categorically state that any one particular activity was participated in solely to prepare men for war. However, a few isolated pieces of evidence do seem to suggest that preparation for war was indeed one of the most significant reasons why men involved themselves in such activities. Xenophon has noted that among the Achaemenians the state bore the expense of some hunting excursions ". . . for the reason that the training it gives seems to be the best preparation for war itself."[6] He further stated that ". . . it is not easy to find any quality required in war that is not required also in the chase."[7] Such statements were probably accurate reflections of the attitudes held by most ancient peoples regarding the use of hunting as a preparation for war. On occasions governments consciously directed young men to prepare themselves to be able soldiers. Thus the Sassanian king, Ardashir, in order to increase the size and effectiveness of his

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[5]Formal boxing and wrestling, as such, would not have been used during battles. Rather forms of these two activities would have been utilized.

[6]Xenophon, Cyropaedia, Trans. Walter Miller, (Loeb Classical Library, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1966), I. ii, 10.

[7]Ibid.

standing army, sent out a directive stating that ". . . all should learn horsemanship and the methods of warfare with battle-axe, bow and poplar-wood arrow."[8] Such a directive would have had a pronounced effect on the nature of the recreational activities pursued by Sassanian youth, in that there would have been an upsurge in the popularity of horse-riding, archery, spear throwing, hunting and other related activities. During both the Assyrian and Persian periods, when kings decided to go to war, similar directives may have been issued, and at such times recreational activities that were used to prepare men for battle would have taken precedence over all others. During periods of relative peace, people would have taken part in recreational activities more for pleasure and enjoyment.

This situation, where the nature of recreational activities participated in was influenced by the immediate threat of warfare, has more modern-day parallels. We have already seen (see page 1) that in times of war the physical education programs throughout Canada became military-oriented, whereas in peacetime, they revolved more around the teaching of skills for relaxation and enjoyment.

While it appeared that there was a definite interrelationship between the frequency of warfare and the nature of the recreational activities participated in by the ancient Assyrians and Persians, it was necessary to consider the influence of a number of other factors when attempting to explain the role played by recreational activities in these two civilizations. Such forces as economic, religious beliefs,

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[8] Reuben Levy (Trans.), The Epic of Kings or Shah-Nama, the National Epic of Persia by Ferdowsi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 278.

social status, methods of education and the need for relaxation and enjoyment all exerted some degree of influence, and in most cases the degree of participation in any one particular activity could only be satisfactorily explained by considering a combination of two or more of the factors mentioned above.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Bibliographical References for Plates

Plate I	Strommenger, op. cit., figure 204.
Plate II	Parrot, The Arts of Assyria, op. cit., plate 52.
Plate III	Strommenger, loc. cit.
Plate IV	Ibid., figure 200.
Plate V	Summa Artis, op. cit., figure 453.
Plate VI	Parrot, op. cit., figure 64.
Plate VII	Strommenger, op. cit., figure 203.
Plate VIII	Ibid., figure 244.
Plate IX	Summa Artis, op. cit., figure 452.
Plate X	Strommenger, op. cit., figure 260.
Plate XI	Summa Artis, op. cit., plate XIV.
Plate XII	Ibid., figure 421.
Plate XIII	Parrot, op. cit., p. 310.
Plate XIV	Ibid., figure 393.
Plate XV	Strommenger, op. cit., figure 266.
Plate XVI	Ibid.
Plate XVII	Parrot, op. cit., figure 394.
Plate XVIII	Ghirshman, Persia: From the Origins to Alexander the Great, op. cit., figure 329.
Plate XIX	Ibid., figure 332.
Plate XX	Ghirshman, Persian Art: Parthian and Sassanian Dynasties, op. cit., figure 122.
Plate XXI	Summa Artis, op. cit., plate I.
Plate XXII	Ghirshman, Persian Art: Parthian and Sassanian Dynasties, op. cit., figure 229.
Plate XXIII	Ibid., figure 220.

Plate XXIV — Ghirshman, Persian Art: Parthian and Sassanian Dynasties, op. cit., figure 340.

Plate XXV — Ibid., figure 247.

Plate XXVI — Ibid., figure 248.

Plate XXVII — Ibid., figure 252.

Plate XXVIII — Summa Artis, op. cit., figure 733.

Plate XXIX — Ghirshman, Persian Art: Parthian and Sassanian Dynasties, op. cit., figure 253.

Plate XXX — Ibid., figure 254.

Plate XXXI — Ibid., figure 255.

Plate XXXII — Ibid., figure 129.

Plate XXXIII — Ibid., figure 255.